



BBC Correspondence
With Sambrook

From Director, News

Alastair Campbell, Esq.,
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10 Downing Street,
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16 June, 2003

Dear Alastair,

Thank you for your latest fax. Let me try again to address your concerns.

You still complain that in one of his many pieces Andrew Gilligan referred to the Joint Intelligence Committee as "a Number 10 Committee" rather than a "Cabinet Office Committee." I can only find one such reference. I concede that the Cabinet Office is not the same as a Prime Ministerial Department though I note that the first objective of the CO is to "support the PM in leading the government." In this instance, Andrew was attempting to simplify a description of the administration of government. I hardly think that amounts to "obvious ignorance" about intelligence issues.

You continue to believe Andrew Gilligan is in conflict with the Producer Guidelines. The Guidelines do say that our programme makers should be reluctant to rely on only one source. This guideline is not an outright ban, and as I explained in my previous letter Andrew Gilligan's judgements about that source (and the judgement of others involved in the decision to broadcast the story) were taken in context. A variety of sources over a period of time had spoken to BBC journalists about their concerns on matters relating to intelligence and WMD. However, we made it plain to the audience that the concern about the dossier's presentation of the 45 minute WMD threat derived from a single source.

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You also say that last week's Intelligence and Security Committee report "confirms Mr. Gilligan's story was wrong." The section of the report you quote does not do so. It states that the intelligence agencies were consulted in the production of the dossier, that the "Assessments Staff" assembled it, and that the JIC endorsed it. All of this is compatible with the dossier being rewritten before publication, and compatible too with the suggestion that some people in the intelligence community were still unhappy after publication as a result of changes in the presentation of the evidence. This is what Andrew Gilligan's source told him and is what we reported. As for your assertion that you know that the source of Andrew Gilligan's information is "not a member of the JIC or directly involved in compiling the dossier" I make no comment. Suffice to say that Andrew Gilligan had discussions with senior BBC colleagues in advance of broadcasting his piece and we are happy about the robustness of his source.

You have now queried our coverage of last week's ISC report generally, referring to "a deliberate lack of clarity." As you will know this coverage was in the hands of reporters other than Andrew Gilligan and it was their conclusion that the most significant areas in the report were the comments on the February dossier rather than the September one - together with the comments about Ministers needing to be better briefed.

You raise a new issue - about communications between yourself and the Intelligence agencies. I have read a number of fairly straightforward scripts quoting Downing Street on this matter which did not repeat the detail of the Sunday Telegraph's version of events. If you feel we got something wrong I would be happy to look into the specific report which gives you concern.

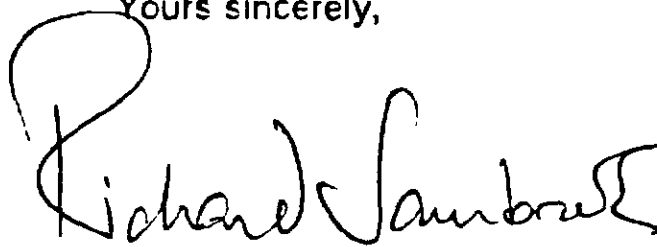
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I am sorry that we still seem far apart on the validity of our reporting on the concerns about the September dossier. I should remind you that we have a Programme Complaints Unit which functions completely separately from production arms of the BBC such as BBC News and reports to the Director General with a right of appeal to the Governors. If you feel it would help, you could make a formal complaint to the Head of the PCU, Fraser Steel.

Yours sincerely,



(Richard Sambrook)

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