

**TRANSCRIPT**

**Programme(s)**

**The Today Programme Radio 4**

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**Subject / interviewee**

**Defence of the Iraq dossiers – Ben Bradshaw**

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**John Humphreys:** *Let me turn to the minister to whom Sir Bernard referred and that is Ben Bradshaw, Minister of State now at the Department of the Environment, good morning to you.*

**Ben Bradshaw:** Morning John.

**JH:** *And, and of course formerly of this programme, a journalist yourself.*

**BB:** That's right.

**JH:** *Is that why you were put up to do this interview?*

**BB:** I wasn't put up I, I read ..

**JH:** *Well I said put up you know what I mean why you were asked to do the interview?*

**BB:** ... you, you asked me to come on the programme and I, I having read Richard Sambrook's so-called response yesterday was so shocked by it and worried about its implications for the BBC's integrity that I offered myself to come on as someone who's spent most of my working life working for the BBC including latterly for your sister programme the World at One for your current editor Kevin Marsh for, for whom I have the highest regard But I think, I think ...

**JH:** *Yes only, only saying put up because it was the Labour Party who offered you to us as it were. So but any way there we are that's, that's ...*

**BB:** yes but I, I put myself up to them

**JH:** ... fine yes, okay well thanks for doing that good to talk to you. *Why did Mr Campbell do what he did last night and go on Channel Four, it's a pretty unusual thing to do isn't it?*

**BB:** It is unusual and I think it reflects the depth of anger felt not just by Alastair but by the Prime Minister and the top of Government and including the top of the intelligence services. And what you avoided to do in your interview with Bernard Ingham is examine the central and original allegation that you made on this programme which is that the Government inserted information in to the dossier against the wishes of the intelligence services knowing it to be false That allegation has not been defended in Richard Sambrook's letter, he has failed to answer a single of the central and very simple questions posed by Alastair Campbell and I can hardly think of a more serious allegation made against a Government, accusing a Government of lying based on a single anonymous source, against BBC producer guidelines, and as I understand it without even trying to check it's veracity by putting a call in to Number 10 first.

**JH:** *Well as you know the allegation was made not by the BBC but by a source, a senior official involved in the compilation of the dossier The BBC certainly does stand by that, Andrew Gilligan made it clear that according to his source the forty*

CAB11/0378

*five minute claim upon which things centred, this thing centred at the time, was real but unreliable intelligence information. That is what he said, we don't report everything that every source tells us, quite clearly, in this instance we did believe that the source was credible and it was legitimate to place his concerns in the public domain.*

**BB:** I'm sorry John may I just quote your own words back to you from 0732 on May 29th when you said, and I quote "Evidence cobbled together at the last minute with some unconfirmed material that had not been approved by the security services". The BBC guidelines (indistinct) ...

**JH:** *You've missed out the word allegations from that.*

**BB:** ... the BBC guidelines are very clear, when I worked for the BBC we were taught not to report something without three reliable sources, I know the World Service has and still has higher standards than the domestic service, but the allegation ..

**JH:** *So you never reported (indistinct) ...*

**BB:** .. the allegation is based on an anonymous source and in, in Richard Sambrook's response to one of Alastair Campbell's questions asking whether the BBC still stands by the allegation Richard Sambrook gives what I think is the most astonishing response by saying Andrew Gilligan accurately reported the source. Does that mean that any journalist can go in to the pub talk to someone and as long as they accurate, accurately report what they say without bothering to put a call in to Number 10 or the Government to see whether it might not be true that that is the current ethics of BBC journalism? I think ...

**JH:** *Well with, with ...*

**BB:** .. is the worrying thing.

**JH:** ... *with the best will in the world you know that that is complete nonsense and, of course, this was not a man in a pub who happened to pop up and say hey guess what I have heard? I mean the fact of the matter is ...*

**BB:** It's a single anonymous (indistinct) ...

**JH:** ... *that when I talked to Adam Ingram, the Armed Forces Minister, immediately after Andrew Gilligan's report he told me that the forty five minute claim had come from a single source. So it seems that a single source is alright for the Government to go to war on or at least form part of the reason why the Government goes to war, but it is not alright for the BBC to report a single, admittedly single, source in the context of what an awful lot of other people were saying as well even though that resource is reliable and has been reliable in the past and is a senior figure.*

**BB:** Yes, yes Mr Sambrook spends about two pages of his response quoting from the newspapers, I mean, are we take it that it's okay for the BBC to report something, something just because it's been in the newspapers ..

**JH:** *No but Mr Campbell made the allegation that we were the only people who were doing this in effect.*

**BB:** ..what do you, what do you, what you have in effect done is accused the Government from the Prime Minister downwards, including the intelligence services, of misleading parliament and ...

**JH:** *No we have not ...*

**BB:** .. and the country ...

**JH:** ... *we have reported an allegation to that effect there is a difference.*

CAB/1/0379

**BB:** .. based, based, based on a single anonymous source when the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the head of the Joint Intelligence Committee, all the heads of all the intelligence committees have denied this and you are holding up a single anonymous source against BBC guidelines BBC guidelines ...

**JH:** *It is not against BBC guidelines if you'd read the BBC guidelines you'd know that.*

**BB:** .. well this is, I have read them and this, and Richard Sambrook quotes them and he quotes, quotes them in, I have to say, a very dishonest way. He quotes them, and I quote "Programmes should be reluctant to rely on only ...

**JH:** *Reluctant indeed reluctant.*

**BB:** ... one source". Only one source, now this was an un-attributable source ...

**JH:** *There is a clear editorial procedure involving referral up to senior managers which was followed in this case.*

**BB:** .. let me finish my point. The BBC guidelines that he quotes in his response say, and I quote "Programmes should be reluctant to rely on only one source". I know and you know that is one on the record source not anonymous ...

**JH:** *Yes but you ..*

**BB:** .. un-attributable source ...

**JH:** ... *but you also ...*

**BB:** ... when you have an anonymous un-attributable source you must, as the BBC who is paid for by the licence fee payer, you have a guaranteed income, you have higher standards than the press, you have to go out of your way to try to corroborate that anonymous source. You did not.

**JH:** *And you well know that in this field sources very rarely, if ever, choose to speak on the record you know that perfectly well, it's a difficult area this for very obvious reasons.*

**BB:** It is difficult but what efforts were made to try to corroborate that source and why did you not even put a call in to the Number 10 press office before going on air with it?

**JH:** *Well we have talked endlessly, endlessly to ministers does it have to be the Number 10 press office, won't a Government Minister do? I spoke to a Government Minister immediately after Andrew Gilligan reported this story, within minutes of reporting that story I spoke to a Government Minister and he told me in the course of that interview, as you know, there had been one source and one source only for the forty five minute claim. Look let me just put this to you if I may Mr Bradshaw ...*

**BB:** Well no, yes, you're trying to change the subject now my point is this ..

**JH:** *Well I tell you what that's what Alastair Campbell's been trying to do for a very long time and that's why I'm trying to ask you some other questions.*

**BB:** You, you admit that the Today Programme did not try to check this story before it broadcast it with any Government press office. I know that to be the case it would be nice if you just admitted it.

**JH:** *I talked to a Government Minister immediately after we had broadcast it ...*

**BB:** After, after . .

**JH:** *and gave him the opportunity to rebut it.*

CAB/1/0380

**BB:** ... you had made a very serious, after you had made a very serious, perhaps the most serious allegation that has been made by the BBC on the basis of an uncorroborated anonymous source.

**JH:** *Do you really believe that if a Minister, that if a journalist goes to the Number 10 press office and says I have information from a source I cannot disclose who has said x, y and z that he is going to get any useful information from the Number 10 press office? You know how the system works as well as I do, what you do is you go to the Minister. We went to the Minister who was put up to talk to us and we asked him questions about it and gave him an opportunity to rebut it ..*

**BB:** No with respect John ..

**JH:** ... and that's as you know normal journalistic practice.

**BB:** ... it's not actually. If you run a story, a very serious allegation about the Government based on a single anonymous source firstly you try to corroborate it yourself but certainly before you broadcast such a serious allegation you give the opportunity to the Government to deny it. You know very well that you didn't do that because the Government would have denied it as the Government did within an hour of it being broadcast ...

**JH:** *And we reported that ...*

**BB:** ... and you wouldn't have had, and you wouldn't have had a story . .

**JH:** ... and we reported ..

**BB:** . . you know that ..

**JH:** ... *on the contrary we reported the story immediately. But look what I'm trying to do, and I know that Mr Campbell's been reluctant to do this, what I'm trying to do if possible is to move away a little bit from this because there are those who believe that this is a smokescreen and that the reason that Mr Campbell has gone so strongly on this is because he is reluctant to have attention focused on the essence of this story which is whether the Government went to war on any sort of a false prospectus. And as Mr Cook told us, Robin Cook told us on this programme yesterday the real issue is that we were told things as a justification for war, says Mr Cook, which have plainly turned out to be wrong since the war was over. The forty five minute readiness of weapons of mass destruction, the fact that Saddam had rebuilt production facilities for chemical weapons which we can't find, that he had a nuclear weapons programme and so on. Do you not agree that those are the sorts of things that we ought to be reporting on or are we not entitled to ask those questions?*

**BB:** Absolutely and yes I do but, I mean, it's calling the, it's the pot calling the kettle black to accuse the Government of a smokescreen. This is a story which you have been running despite ..

**JH:** *Are you not going to deal with any of those issues I've just raised?*

**BB:** ... this is a story which you on the Today Programme and the rest of the BBC have been running for a month now which has been rebutted from the Prime Minister through the security services downwards. It's not the Government that has been perpetuating this it is you and for you now to accuse the Government of a smokescreen by challenging the integrity of BBC journalism ..

**JH:** *Well, well look we can, we can ...*

**BB:** . . is astonishing

CAB|1|0381

**JH:** ... well we can stay with this if you like. Let me just tell you that we did speak to the Ministry of Defence, I mean, it would be quite nice to move away from this a little bit but you're clearly reluctant to do so. We did as it happens speak ...

**BB:** I'm not reluctant ...

**JH:** ... well let me, let me tell you because ...

**BB:** .. to talk about anything ...

**JH:** .. you've made a serious ...

**BB:** .. you invited me on this programme to talk about the row between the Government and the BBC and I, it goes back to .

**JH:** ... you, you, you and, alright ...

**BB:** .. the essential accusation that the BBC made at the beginning which it is still not big enough to admit it was a mistake ..

**JH:** ... we checked ...

**BB:** . . . and I know from talking to people in the BBC John, and I'm sure you do too, that there are many, many senior journalists in the BBC who are deeply unhappy at the way the BBC has handled this.

**JH:** ... oh, oh on the contrary, on the contrary Mr Bradshaw, on the contrary. I have yet to find a single journalist in the BBC either in management or, as it were, the shop floor level who takes that view. And let me just tell you since you ...

**BB:** You clearly don't speak to very many

**JH:** ... oh I don't speak to many alright that's fine you speak to more of course you do, obviously you do. Let me ...

**BB:** Well I have spoken to many who are deeply unhappy with the way the BBC has handled this.

**JH:** . . . well, well indeed there were are you, you obviously know how many I've spoken to and all that so I, I bow to your expertise in that area.

**BB:** Well I have more than one anonymous source.

**JH:** Well alright no I, I bow to you on that clearly you, you work for the BBC you talk to people everyday in the BBC as I do, I fully understand that, I thought you were running a bit of a Government department but there were are, you're spending your time talking to the BBC that's absolutely fine. But let me just tell you that what we did before the Gilligan report was published, what Andrew Gilligan did was he checked with the Ministry of Defence You say that you, he called the Ministry of Defence and told them the story was being run so they had an opportunity to rebut it.

**BB:** Well you haven't answered my question did your programme put the specific allegation that the Government was deliberately misleading against the wishes of the intelligence services the, the public and parliament? Was that allegation ...

**JH:** Yes, the answer is yes I've answered it, I've just told you the answer is yes.

**BB:** ... well that's, not that's not what you said You said that Andrew Gilligan put a call in to the Ministry of Defence .

**JH:** That's right.

**BB:** .. was, was their allegation ...

**JH:** Sorry is there a particular procedure that you should ...

CAB/1/0382

**BB:** ... a very serious allegation put to the Government, put to Number 10, the Number 10 press office no it wasn't.

**JH:** .. sorry did he have to go to the Number 10 press office wasn't the Ministry of Defence adequate? We have talked to the Secretary of State for Defence about this whole thing many times, we have talked to the Foreign Secretary, this was a Ministry of Defence story at that level. He spoke to the Ministry of Defence, that's what he does.

**BB:** Well I think we expect ..

**JH:** *Is that not good enough?*

**BB:** .. more professional, no it's not good enough I'm afraid.

**JH:** *Are you going to tell us who've we've got to talk to in Government as well now?*

**BB:** It's, it's not good enough and you know John it's not good enough. We expect higher standards of journalism from the BBC than we do from our tabloid press, you're funded by the licence fee payer, you have a guaranteed income from the licence fee payer it means you have to be objective ..

**JH:** *Well is that relevant?*

**BB:** ... you have to be impartial. There are quite clear BBC guidelines that you should not rely on a single anonymous source certainly ...

**JH:** *No there are not quite clear we've been over that once there are not quite clear ..*

**BB:** ... yes there are, no, no and again . .

**JH:** .. *guidelines (indistinct) ..*

**BB:** .. an example of Richard Sambrook's dissembling is how he answers that question You talk, the BBC guidelines talk about one on the record source you should not rely on this was one off the record source, there was no attempt to corroborate and there was no attempt to give a right of reply to the Government before you broadcast the most serious accusation that I can ever remember being levelled against a Government in my life time

**JH:** *Do you still stand, does the Government, do you personally still stand by the forty five minute claim?*

**BB:** Yes I do and that will come, I believe, and I'm confident that will come out in the inquiries of both the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Intelligence Committee and I think it's a great shame when Richard Sambrook acknowledges that if the BBC is proved wrong ...

**JH:** *Isn't it ...*

**BB:** ... he will apologise but, I mean, I don't see why ..

**JH:** ... *isn't it interesting that Mr Hoon, Geoff Hoon, to whom I spoke after this and to Jack Straw both said, in Mr Hoon's case I never made that claim and in Mr Straw's case I didn't make the claim either. Isn't it interesting that they, they've not actually supported that claim in the same way that you have just done?*

**BB:** Well they may not have but the Joint Intelligence Committee ...

**JH:** *That's Defence Secretary and Foreign Secretary.*

**BB:** ... the Joint Intelligence Committee which made the claim and put it in the dossier, which was approved by the Prime Minister, the head of the Joint Intelligence Committee, the head of the all the intelligence committees, have said that they are

CAB/1/0383

satisfied with that. But, you know, that will come out in the current parliamentary inquiry. But that's not ...

**JH:** *Well, you know, with, with great respect ...*

**BB:** ... that's not the accusation ...

**JH:** *... but, you know that's (indistinct) ...*

**BB:** ... John the accusation that you made ..

**JH:** *.. this is crucial we went to war partly on the basis of that claim. You want to turn this in to a row, and very effectively it's been done, in to a row between the BBC and Alastair Campbell. The fact is that serious comments were made, serious allegations were then made subsequent to those comments in the dossier and we went to war on what some people believe was a false prospectus. That is the most serious charge that has been made throughout this whole period, British soldiers are dying in Iraq because of decisions that the Government (indistinct) took. If you're seriously telling me that the BBC does not have a responsibility to question every single action that the Government took including the publication of that particular dossier, not to mention the dossier that was complete Horlicks in the words of the Foreign Secretary, then I'm deeply surprised and I'm puzzled at your interpretation of what the BBC is for.*

**BB:** I'm not saying that and, I mean, you refer to other dossier and the Government has been big enough and was at the time to admit that it made a mistake. What would be nice sometimes ...

**JH:** *After a while.*

**BB:** ... no at the time, what would be nice sometimes is if the BBC were big enough and confident enough to admit that it has made a mistake and I think the failure to do so is damaging the BBC extremely seriously and I, I know I don't work for the BBC anymore, I talk to lots of BBC journalists, many of them are my friends including the editor of your programme, and many people have told me that they think the BBC is making a serious mistake.

**JH:** *Well look I really can't let that rest, I mean, I really cannot rest, let that rest. The idea that the editor of this programme has suggested to you that the BBC has made a serious mistake is preposterous ...*

**BB:** That's not what I said again you're twisting my words

**JH:** *... and I expect you to apologise for that.*

**BB:** That is not what I said ...

**JH:** *You implied it very, very clearly ...*

**BB:** ... it is not what I said, no ...

**JH:** *.. you implied it and you know and I know that the editor of this programme stands one hundred per cent behind that story so does the Director General of the BBC so does the Director of News, every senior single editor in this organisation stands one hundred per cent behind that story and the way we treated it and you know that Mr Bradshaw*

**BB:** It's not the accusation that I was making I was telling you and you were challenging me earlier implying that I didn't know anyone in the BBC and didn't talk to people in the BBC. You know as well as I do there are many people in the BBC who are unhappy about this ...

**JH:** *I do not know that, I repeat I do not know that.*

CAB/1/0384

**BB:** .. well you should do ...

**JH:** *There we are.*

**BB:** ... when a political journalist of the calibre and experience of Peter Riddell writes that he thinks the BBC ...

**JH:** *He doesn't work for the BBC as you well know*

**BB:** ... well, you know, well that makes him a little bit more independent doesn't it? He writes, probably the most respected political journalist in this country says, that the BBC has a case to answer, I think you do have a case to answer John and you should be, be big enough for once to admit it.

**JH:** *Ben Bradshaw many thanks.*

**End**

CAB/1/0385