

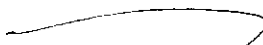
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There remain many discrepancies between Gilligan's account of what he claims to have been told by the official and the official's own version of what transpired. We still cannot exclude the possibility that the main source, or other sources, are elsewhere. But it may be possible to explain and reconcile at least some of the mismatches. An official who denies having had access to the intelligence reporting or a hand in the production of the intelligence part of the dossier, as the official does, may nevertheless have said enough based on his expert knowledge of the earlier Iraqi programme, for someone of Gilligan's methods to claim that the official discredited the "45 minutes" intelligence eg by stating that such a high level of readiness did not correspond to the Iraqi systems of which he was aware.

Records of the MOD's interview with the official are still being prepared. I have asked that they be forwarded to us as soon as possible. But I wanted you and colleagues to be aware of this development immediately. The Times story today, whether accurate or not, will increase the likelihood that over the weekend other journalists will indeed identify and name the BBC's source as our official. (He is as I indicated in my earlier letter well known in media/academic circles)

There are also considerations, as we discussed yesterday, whether the Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman should be informed of what we now know, however inconclusive, before their report is published on Monday. And there is the question of whether this plays into the continuing impasse between the Government and the BBC.

I am copying this letter to Andrew Turnbull, David Manning (No 10), Michael Jay (FCO), Eliza Manningham-Buller (Security Service) and John Scarlett (JIC)

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