

what he said having spoken to the Head of SIS. Put to him that he might have been put up to it, the PMOS said that if that were so then clearly our reach was somewhat greater than he had ever thought.

PRESS BRIEFING: 11AM MONDAY 7 JULY 2003

IRAQ/BBC

Referring to the publication this morning of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee (FAC) report, the Prime Minister's Official Spokesman (PMOS) said that we would give our formal response to it in due course. He took the opportunity to point out one factual correction as a result of a comment made at this morning's FAC press conference in which one member had said that the Prime Minister did not deal with the JIC direct, but rather left it to his Director of Communications and Strategy, Alastair Campbell. That suggestion was completely and utterly wrong. Mr Campbell had no role in the intelligence assessment process and the Prime Minister dealt directly with the JIC.

The PMOS said that the BBC's central allegation had always been that which had been made on the morning of 29 May: that Number 10/Alastair Campbell had inserted the 45-minute intelligence into the document; that it had done so probably knowing it to be wrong; and that it had done so against the wishes of the intelligence agencies. Not only did the FAC report contain no evidence to support this assertion, but paragraph 11 stated clearly that Mr Campbell had not played any role in the inclusion of the 45-minute intelligence, and had not exerted, or sought to exert, improper influence on the drafting of the September dossier (paragraph 13). Paragraph 14 also concluded that, in the absence of reliable evidence showing that intelligence personnel had neither complained about, nor sought to distance themselves from, the contents of the dossier, allegations of politically inspired meddling could not be credibly established. Finally - and crucially - paragraph 33 underlined that Ministers had not misled Parliament.

The PMOS said that we also noted that the BBC Governors' statement yesterday had not specifically defended the original allegations. The key question this morning, therefore, was the same as that on May 29. It was not a matter of whether the BBC should have run the story, but whether it now believed and accepted the story to be right or wrong - given that it had now been proven to be false. That had now been stated by Number 10, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Defence Secretary, the Chairman of the JIC, the heads of the intelligence agencies - and now the committee, whose members were now even saying that they could find no evidence to support the claim.

Asked if the Government accepted the minority view of the FAC that there was insufficient evidence to clear Alastair Campbell, the PMOS said it was important

CAB/1/0201