

Gavyn Davies

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From: Gavyn Davies  
Sent: 06 July 2003 12:41  
To: zzDame Pauline Neville-Jones  
Subject: RE: Governors' Meeting on Sunday night

agreed

-----Original Message-----

From: zzDame Pauline Neville-Jones  
Sent: 05 July 2003 22:50  
To: Gavyn Davies  
Subject: RE: Governors' Meeting on Sunday night

Gavyn,  
Mary thanks. We will obviously need to discuss further at the meeting. We are in a tight corner and the best route forward is certainly not obvious.

I do not think that what I am suggesting automatically leads to the consequences you outline, though I accept it could. We need equally to look at the pros and cons of simply reiterating our previous judgements. Some might argue that we were not being strong, but weak and in the grip of management. We have somehow to retain the confidence of management while not looking its patsy to the outside world. My ploy is the sort of classic government itself resorts to. When it gets hot, reach for the icebox.

Donald Anderson let just enough drop at Wimbledon to make it clear that he will be critical of the BBC on Monday. So we need to be very careful. Pauline

-----Original Message-----

From: Gavyn Davies  
Sent: 05 July 2003 10:57  
To: zzDame Pauline Neville-Jones  
Subject: RE: Governors' Meeting on Sunday night

Pauline --

Thank you very much for this. I understand entirely your points, and I do think that we need to initiate further work on several topics after our meeting tomorrow. Not all of these need to be made public immediately, I think. Among others, these should probably include: outside articles in newspapers, the use of single sources, the opportunity for gov't and others to respond to our stories, and to deny them, the training of news staff about impartiality and accuracy (a point which Richard Ryder is very keen on).

I am, however, very reluctant to open any inquiry into our overall news coverage during the war. I think this would (a) call into question our two previous Board opinions, made in March and April, and published at the time, and (b) allow Campbell to drive a wedge between Governors and the Executive, and demonstrate uncertainty about a very central matter. I think this could greatly damage the BBC. Apart from our own judgments, made at the time of the war, we now know that we maintained the trust of our audiences during the war (there is a fair bit of polling evidence which tends to support this conclusion), and we also have the Cardiff study which indicates that the BBC coverage was more pro-government than other news broadcasters during the conflict. I would argue that there is no new evidence which requires us to re-open the decisions of the March and April Boards -- in fact, rather the reverse.

In general, I continue to believe that this is a moment for the Governors to stand up for BBC independence, in the face of a massively exaggerated attack by Aastair on the integrity of the entire organisation. He has not just raised a few specific points -- he has launched a full frontal assault. I agree that we need to do this without reaching over-hasty judgments, and without leaving hostages to fortune. But if we over-complicate the message tomorrow, I think we will be portrayed as buckling in the face of intense bullying, and I believe that this will do us fatal damage in the long term - not just with the DG and the Exec, but with the vast number of outsiders who are looking for us to stand up to threats from Alastair.

Best wishes

Gavyn

-----Original Message-----

From: zzDame Pauline Neville-Jones

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