

Barbara Kerr

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Don't know if you've seen this

From: Nik Gowing-INTERNET  
Sent: 02 July 2003 06:55 PM  
To: Richard Sambrook-Internal  
Subject: Intelligence and WMD

Richard

For reasons that will be clear, I hesitated to send this to you until I knew I could send it on the secure internal e-mail, and not from outside the BBC net. (I was out of the country last weekend during the tensions between the BBC and No 10)

Technically this is very deep background and never took place. But I think I should place the information before you in case it helps sharpen for you the current issues of intelligence and Iraq.

On the weekend of [redacted] I was a participant at a [redacted] conference on Terrorism. Attendees came from MI5, MI6, the FBI and CIA etc etc. My position as a BBC News Presenter was explicit in the invitation.

A central issue in the deep background discussions on Saturday morning became the credibility of intelligence, both on terrorism and Iraq. During the free time on Saturday afternoon, I was encouraged into an empty drawing room by [redacted] was [redacted] initiative. We had met socially occasionally and spoken informally, but I had never made a formal approach to make contact.

[redacted] was clearly troubled about the issue of the credibility of intelligence relating to Iraq and wanted to discover how to convince the media and public opinion on WMD intelligence from Iraq. I took no note of the conversation. But I recall distinctly [redacted] probing me to find out how willing in the coming days and weeks the media would be to accept all that had been claimed in the governments Iraq WMD dossier from September.

I made clear that our job was to challenge, question and find holes in the intelligence claims, not to accept the dossiers without question, especially after the IISS dossier of earlier in September which was more cautious in some aspects of WMD claims.

[redacted] led me to be even more robust. The chat on the settee lasted 20 minutes, I suppose, then I went for a walk. But I recall the number of times [redacted] winced and seemed troubled when I underlined repeatedly. If you want us to believe you, then you must be more open and specific about the intelligence.

I remember specifically testing [redacted] on the government's 45-minute warning claim. [redacted] winced noticeably again and did not choose to give the clear positive response I had invited [redacted] to give. [redacted] then said several times that the intelligence was there. However I felt that this was merely the message [redacted] had taken me aside to convey.

In some of the specifics I had the impression that MI6 was troubled by some (but not all) of the published claims from the government about WMD.

The nature of my presenting role meant that I had no immediate outlet to report the sense of what I had learned. But it obviously helped shape the manner of my questioning and presenting on air in coming weeks in the build up and during the conduct of the war. Without being specific on sources, I shared some of the above findings verbally with Steve Williams on the following Tuesday/Wednesday.

What I am sharing with you is not definitive evidence one way or the other, but may help in a modest way to fine tune the BBC's case.

Nik

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