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POLITICS

BBC dossier source believed to be in Iraq

By Tom Baldwin

THE source for battery con-
tested allegations that Down-
ing Street "sewed up" its
dossier on Saddam Hussein's
weapons of mass destruction is
a military expert who is now
based in Iraq, BBC insiders are
claiming.

The revelation came as the
BBC confirmed last night that
its government would meet Mr
Dyke tomorrow to discuss the
corporation's position before
publication of a report by MPs
on Monday.

Although the BBC has re-
fused to name the informant,
its executives have suggested
that disclosure of his identity
would transform a debate
which has stuttered feebly in
the Government's favour over
recent days.

Andrew Gilligan, the Radio
4 Today programme defence
correspondent at the centre of
the row, has revealed the
name of his source only to
Richard Sambrook, the BBC's
chief of news. The position
held — but not the name
of the official — is also known to
Greg Dyke, the corporation's
Director-General, and Kevin
Marsh, the Editor of Today.
BBC journalists have been
told that Mr Gilligan's anony-
mous source is among the 100
British intelligence and weap-

ons specialists currently in
Iraq as part of the American-
led survey group searching for
Saddam's missing weapons of
mass destruction (WMD).

This information is in line
with a briefing to The Times
from a senior BBC executive
this week, who said that at-
tempts to contact Mr Gilli-
gan's source in the past month
to ask supplementary ques-
tions had proved unsuccessful
because of the nature of his
position. Asked if he was now
based abroad, the executive
replied: "Something like that."

The head of the British con-
tingent, Brigadier John Dever-
ell, is unlikely to have been the
BBC's source because he has
no background in military
intelligence and was previous-
ly based in Saudi Arabia.

MPs are expected to clear
Alastair Campbell, the Prime
Minister's communications di-
rector, of charges that he
forced intelligence chiefs to in-
clude in last year's dossier "un-
reliable" information about
Iraq's capacity to deploy
WMD within 45 minutes.

The report by the Commons
Foreign Affairs Committee,
which is due out on Monday,
will criticise Mr Campbell over
his handling of intelligence
information in general and,
in particular, the use of
plagiarised material in the



RICHARD CANNON

ment closing ranks in recent
days, Downing Street has high-
lighted the support that it has
received during this row from
senior Tory MPs. They in-
clude Nicholas Soames, a
former Armed Forces Minis-
ter, Sir Patrick Cormack,
who resigned from the For-
eign Affairs Committee last
month partly because he
thought an inquiry into intelli-
gence material was inappropriate,
and Robert Jackson, anoth-
er former minister.

However, earlier comments
by John Reid, the Health Sec-
retary, suggesting that there
are "rogue elements" within
the intelligence services trying
to undermine the Government
are widely supported within
the Labour Party.

In evidence to the Foreign
Affairs Committee, Mr Gilli-
gan stated that his anonymous
source was "one of the senior
officials in charge of drafting
up the dossier", and was "close-
ly connected with the question
of Iraq's WMD, easily suf-
ficiently senior and credible to
be worth reporting".

He also suggested that the
source was an "expert in the
field" who had a precise an-
alysis of Iraq's chemical or
biological weapons capability
in the build up to war.

Mitchell, the head of Radio 4,
and Mark Damazer, the depu-
ty director of news, are all com-
ing under scrutiny.
Mr Sambrook and Mr
Damazer yesterday toured the
Today programme's news-
room in an apparent attempt
to boost morale after reports
in The Times that "heads will
roll" over the row with Down-
ing Street.

Mr Campbell yesterday in-
sisted that he respected the
BBC as an institution, indicat-
ing that his problem was with
a minority of its journalists
and executives. He will press
on with his attack against the
corporation unless he receives
an apology next week.

No 10 does not want a clash
with the intelligence services,
with Mr Campbell pointing
out that their integrity has also
been put on the line by the
BBC's allegations.

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