



SM

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27 June, 2003

Dear Alastair

Thank you for your letter of 26th June. I chose not to reply yesterday as I wanted time to examine fully the questions you asked and to write a considered reply. That was not possible in the timescale you gave me.

Before I answer the questions in detail I wish to explain the wider context in which we came to broadcast the story in question. I will summarise this under three headings:

- Your general claim that the BBC's reporting of the war and the events both before and after was biased.
- The impact of your February dossier being discredited.
- The general concern expressed by members of the security services that intelligence reports were being exaggerated.

1. Allegations of biased reporting

In your evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee you made it clear that you believed the BBC had an anti-war agenda. It is our firm view that Number Ten tried to intimidate the BBC in its reporting of events leading up to the war and during the course of the war itself. As we told you in correspondence before the war started, our responsibility was to present an impartial picture and you were not best placed to judge what was impartial. This was particularly the case given the widescale opposition to the war in the UK at that time, including significant opposition inside the Parliamentary

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