

Moreover, as these reports fitted in to a general pattern of concern, conveyed to a number of BBC journalists with good contacts in the security services, we consider that it was entirely proper to reflect some unease about the presentation of the Government's arguments in the disputed dossiers.

The Board is satisfied that it was in the public interest to broadcast Mr Gilligan's story, given the information which was available to BBC News at the time. We believe it would not have been in the public interest to have suppressed the stories on either the Today programme or Newsnight.

- Third, the Board considers that the Today programme should have kept a clearer account of its dealings with the Ministry of Defence on this story and could have also asked the No 10 Press Office for a response prior to broadcasting the story. However, we note that firm government denials of the story were broadcast on the Today Programme within 90 minutes of the original broadcast by Andrew Gilligan, and these were followed soon after on the same programme by equally firm denials by a defence minister.
- Fourth, the Board intends to look again at the rules under which BBC reporters and presenters are permitted to write for newspapers, once it has received recommendations from the Director of News. This examination will be conducted during the summer.

Finally, the Board wishes to place on record that the BBC has never accused the Prime Minister of lying, or of seeking to take Britain into war under misleading or false pretences. The BBC did not have an agenda in its war coverage, nor does it now have any agenda which questions the integrity of the Prime Minister.

In summary, the Governors are ultimately responsible for ensuring that the BBC upholds the highest standards of impartiality and accuracy. We are wholly satisfied that BBC journalists and their managers sought to maintain impartiality and accuracy during this episode.

BBC Press Office
7 July 2003

BBC/6/112 753