

Thank you for your letter replying to mine of x.

You appear to misunderstand the purpose of my letter. I am not asking you to divulge your reporter's source, and I fully understand why you would not do so.

The issue here, however, is not source protection, as the individual who has come forward to the MoD has voluntarily identified himself and indicated his willingness to be interviewed by a Parliamentary inquiry. So if this person is Mr Gilligan's source, the individual is content to be identified as such.

If he is not the source, then we need press the matter no further

However, given the controversy this has caused, and as your defence of your reporting rests on the claim that the SOURCE, not the BBC, was making the allegations, I think it important that the name of the person be given to the BBC.

I assume, on such an important issue on which the Board of Governors has expressed total support for the reporter concerned, that proper inquiries have been made within the BBC as to the identity, seniority and credibility of the source. I also understand that these inquiries are continuing.

It is surely therefore helpful for me to give you the name of this person, so that it can be established whether this is the name of the person given to his employers by Mr Gilligan. If it is not, fine. If it is, then clearly there are major discrepancies between the real status of the individual, and that claimed by Mr Gilligan and Mr Sambrook. Equally, there are major discrepancies between the account of the meeting on May 22 given by the source, and the account given by Mr Gilligan on air, in print and to the Foreign Affairs Committee.

I can tell you that the person is named x x, and he is employed as y y. (with some explanation about the unusual status.)

I am releasing this letter to the press, with the person's name and status withheld.

CAB/11/0137