

On the substance of the issue, as the Foreign Office had made clear to the Guardian last week, the Foreign Secretary did not, and had never had, "serious doubts over Iraqi weapons claims".

The PMOS said that while we were in clarifying and correcting mode, he would like to use the opportunity to make a few points regarding Andrew Gilligan's report this morning on the BBC concerning the Joint Intelligence Committee.

First, to clarify: Andrew Gilligan had said: "The Joint Intelligence Committee is not the intelligence services", but had then gone on to say that "the intelligence services are represented". For the avoidance of any doubt, they were in fact represented by the Heads of the three intelligence and Security Agencies, namely the Secret Intelligence Service, Government Communications Headquarters and the Security Service.

Secondly, Mr Gilligan had also said that the JIC was "a Downing Street Committee". This was wrong. It was a Cabinet Committee. It was part of the Cabinet Office, and was under the authority of the Cabinet Secretary.

Thirdly, another correction: Mr Gilligan had said, "The JIC is the Committee in which disputes between the intelligence services and Downing Street are mediated." This was wrong. As page 9 of the dossier we had published last September made clear, "The JIC provides regular intelligence assessments to the Prime Minister, other ministers and senior officials on a wide range of foreign policy and international security issues". As we had said yesterday, the JIC pulled the threads together, assessed the information available and provided the overall intelligence picture for ministers. It was not ACAS for spies.

One final correction: Mr Gilligan had said that "...there's absolutely no doubt that there was rather a major row in that Committee". That was wrong. As the Prime Minister had made clear, all the information in the September dossier had been provided by the JIC. It was their material.

The PMOS drew journalists' attention to a Government leaflet, entitled 'National Intelligence Machinery', which had been published a leaflet a decade ago, which provided further factual information about the JIC and the intelligence services.

Asked if Downing Street would admit it was now engaged in a vendetta against Mr Gilligan, the PMOS said no. He had simply pointed out some factual corrections. Since we had now been talking about this issue for many days, he thought it obvious it was obviously important to do so on the basis of accuracy. As always, our aim was to help journalists. Asked if it was now Downing Street's intention to give a running commentary on Mr Gilligan's reports, the PMOS said no. However, given the story was now in its eighth day, it was not

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