

fact that they had been defended from the very top of the BBC, we believed that it was right for us to put our perfectly legitimate questions into the public domain.

Asked if Downing Street would consider the BBC to have lied if the person who had come forward turned out to be their source, the PMOS said that we were deliberately not over-stating our degree of knowledge over whether this was or was not the BBC's source. We were also being very careful not to leap ahead and reach conclusions about what the implications might be. Journalists might want to do that, but he would not until he had a basis on which to do so.

Niger/Uranium

Asked for a reaction to the US's admission that the Niger/uranium claim was false, the PMOS said he was surprised that journalists had not yet picked up on what we had been saying consistently about this matter. As Mr Ehrman from the FCO had told the FAC on 27 June, this intelligence had not been based on the forged documents, but had come from a different source. "The intelligence came from a foreign service and we understand that it was briefed to the IAEA in 2003". Put to him that the US was saying that the entire claim was untrue, the PMOS said he did not think that was precisely the Americans' point. But, as he was not a spokesman for the Administration, he would leave it to them to explain.

Asked why Downing Street disagreed with the White House's view that President Bush should not have referred to the Niger/uranium claim in his State of the Union Address, the PMOS said that it had been included on the basis of the US's knowledge. We had included the material in our dossier on the basis of our knowledge, which was different. Asked if our information had been based on material passed to our intelligence services by other security services - as the Prime Minister had appeared to imply to the Liaison Committee yesterday, the PMOS said no. Questioned as to whether the intelligence had come from the CIA, the PMOS said no. Asked who had provided the information, the PMOS said that he was unable to comment on intelligence issues. That said, journalists could be assured that the material had been properly assessed and had been subjected to rigorous JIC procedures. Asked whether the intelligence would be passed on to the ISC, the PMOS said that he had no intention of providing a running commentary on the work of the ISC. It went without saying, however, that the Committee would be supplied with all relevant material. Asked if the intelligence would be passed on to the US, the PMOS said that we always shared information with the relevant people, as you would expect. The important point was that we had included it in our dossier following our own analysis and assessment. Pressed as to why we weren't handing the information over to the

CAB/1/0216