

29th June

LETTER FROM ALASTAIR CAMPBELL TO RICHARD SAMBROOK

Thank you for your letter of 27 June.

I am saddened that you have failed to answer the direct questions I put to you. One month to the day since you broadcast these allegations, surely you have been able to establish whether or not you are satisfied that they are true. I was also very surprised that your defence now rests on the principle that you can report anything that a source says, regardless of its veracity, provided that you report accurately what the source has told you.

I note in particular that you have been unable to substantiate the most damaging allegations - namely that we "sexed up" the WMD dossier by inserting, against the wishes of the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee and the Intelligence Agencies, the 45 minute intelligence whilst knowing it to be untrue, and so helped the Prime Minister to persuade Parliament and the country to go to war on a false basis.

The BBC's report of 29 May - the allegations from which have been repeated by the BBC many times since and, thanks to the BBC have been repeated by broadcast and print media around the world - was wrong in every material respect. The BBC has, in effect, been standing by a single, uncorroborated anonymous source who gave you wholly false and inaccurate information - a source who seems, to put it at its kindest, to have been operating away from the centre of events.

Your editorial team showed poor professional judgement and competence in relying on such a source without making any further checks, or putting the allegations to the people against whom they were being made. You and other senior BBC executives, for your part, seem unwilling to grapple with the fact that you broadcast a manifestly inadequate piece of journalism; that you are standing by a story that is simply untrue.

I respect, however, the BBC's independence, if not in this instance its competence. Given how far apart we remain, I see little purpose in continuing our exchanges in advance of the Foreign Affairs Committee report being published. You will also be aware of the separate inquiry by the Intelligence and Security Committee which will also have a bearing on these issues. Let us first await the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Committee report. I reserve the right at that time, or subsequently, to pursue my case further, possibly, in the way that you suggest, through the BBC Programme Complaints Unit.

CAB/1/0373