

WEDNESDAY 9th JULY 3.45PM

IRAQ/BBC

Asked if Geoff Hoon had received a reply to his letter from the BBC, the PMOS said no. The letter had only been sent at lunchtime today. He reminded journalists that we were not asking the BBC to reveal the name of their source. All we wanted to know was whether we were wrong about the person who had come forward and identified himself voluntarily. Everyone in public life made mistakes. That was a fact of life. Usually those mistakes were acknowledged and corrected. The BBC was a public service broadcaster and no doubt operated on the same standards. We assumed that they would want to set the record straight in this case too now that they had received the relevant information from Mr Hoon.

Put to him that the person who had come forward could not be the BBC's source because he did not fit Andrew Gilligan's criteria, the PMOS said that if today's Daily Telegraph report was correct and the BBC had briefed privately that Mr Gilligan had met his source at a central London hotel on 22 May, it was perfectly legitimate for us to ask how many more people he had met on that date at a central London hotel. Since the individual involved had already revealed his identity, it was no defence to refuse to answer the question on the grounds of betraying confidentiality. All we wanted to know was whether the person was the BBC's source or not. It was a pretty simple question to answer. Put to him that it was in fact a question of betraying confidentiality because there were already strong indications showing that the person who had come forward was not the BBC's source, the PMOS said he would disagree. The person had said that he had met Mr Gilligan on 22 May at a central London hotel. Put to him that the person had also admitted that they had not talked about any of the issues which Mr Gilligan had insisted he had talked about with his source, the PMOS said that that was completely untrue. They had spoken about the 45-minute claim and whether Alastair Campbell had been involved in the decision to insert the information in the September dossier. Put to him that it was Mr Gilligan himself who had raised the issues, the PMOS said that Mr Gilligan had told the FAC that he had only talked to one source about the 45-minute claim. He had talked to other people about other matters. If the person who had come forward was not the source, it should be asked why Mr Gilligan had not mentioned him in his FAC hearing.

In answer to further questions, the PMOS said it had been suggested that Downing Street was currently engaged in a 'knocking down process', meaning that we would knock down each name that came up. That was untrue. The

CAB | 11/0511