

whole situation boiled down to the fact that the person in question had come forward and had said that he had met Mr Gilligan on 22 May at a central London hotel. How many people did Mr Gilligan meet at a hotel in central London on that date? Asked how we could be so sure that this person had met Mr Gilligan at the time and place he had stated, the PMOS said that we were sure because the person had said so. Put to him that we appeared to be relying on a single source again, the PMOS pointed out that we were relying on a single source who had no motivation to reveal the truth. This was someone who had put his belief in public service above the implications for his career. He had clearly believed it was his duty and public service responsibility to come forward and admit what he had done. This was something which should be recognised in the spirit in which it had been done, rather than treated cynically. Although we had been very careful not to rush to judgement in terms of whether he was the BBC source, it was perfectly legitimate for us to ask the BBC whether he was or not. If he was, we were entitled to ask why there was a discrepancy over his status. If he was not the source, we invited the BBC to tell us we were wrong.

Asked if we would come up with another name to put to the BBC if it turned out that the person who had come forward was not their source, the PMOS said that if this person was the source, then his status was not that which had been originally claimed. He was not someone who had access to the intelligence which had been included in the dossier. Nor had he been one of those who had put the document together. Consequently, it was clear that he was not in a position to make the claim the BBC had asserted he had made. The BBC had always defended the reporting of the allegation by saying that it was the source who had made the claim, not them. However, given this person had said that he had not made those claims and had not been in a position to make them, it questioned the legitimacy of the original allegation. Equally, if this person was not the source, why had Mr Gilligan told the FAC that he had only discussed the September dossier with one person? Why had he not said he had discussed it with a variety of people given the fact that the person who had come forward had said that he had met Mr Gilligan on the same day Mr Gilligan was reported to have met his source.

Questioned as to whether Geoff Hoon had written his letter to the BBC in green ink given Downing Street's apparent obsession with the whole issue, the PMOS said that on the day Mr Gilligan had made his charge, people had said that the allegation went right to heart of the integrity of the Government. The claim was the most serious that could be made against any Government. We therefore hoped that it had not been made lightly or falsely and that the claims

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