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IRAQ DOSSIER

# MoD claims to have identified BBC source

By James Blitz and Tim Burt

The feud between the government and the BBC reopened last night when the Ministry of Defence claimed it had identified the potential source for the *Today* programme's allegation that Downing Street "doctored" a dossier on Iraqi weapons.

In a move designed to put renewed pressure on the BBC, the MoD said one of its officials had admitted to discussing the dossier with Andrew Gilligan, defence correspondent for the *Today* programme, at an "unauthorised" meeting at a London hotel.

According to the MoD, the meeting took place one week before Mr Gilligan broadcast a report on May 29, in which he quoted an unnamed official stating that Downing Street had added material to last September's dossier against the advice of intelligence chiefs.

The MoD said the unnamed figure was not "one of the senior officials in charge of drawing up the dossier" as Mr Gilligan claimed in the programme. Nor did the official make

any allegation during the meeting about the role played by Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair's media chief, in compiling the dossier.

The BBC rejected the government's claim last night that the person cited by the MoD could be Mr Gilligan's source. The BBC said "Mr Gilligan's source does not work in the Ministry of Defence." It also said Mr Gilligan had known the source for a number of years and not "months" as stated by the MoD.

Geoff Hoon, the defence secretary, last night wrote to Gavyn Davies, the BBC chairman, saying he would disclose the identity of the MoD official if the corporation confirmed he was the source of Mr Gilligan's story. Mr Davies rejected the offer, believing it amounted to a trap to try to damage the name of the BBC.

It was unclear last night why the BBC could not categorically rule out that the official cited by the MoD was the source of Mr Gilligan's story.

The BBC said "We note that the MoD statement says that 'we do not know

whether this official is Mr Gilligan's source' Neither do we."

But Mr Gilligan told the Commons' foreign affairs select committee on June 19 that he had a "specific source for this specific story which is a single source."

The MoD, meanwhile, is able to specifically identify an individual who met Mr Gilligan in a London hotel on May 22.

Mr Gilligan told the committee he had four sources on the broad WMD story, but he only discussed the September dossier with one of them.

Mr Gilligan said one of the sources spoke to him about the link being made by the prime minister between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda.

A second spoke about the "dodgy dossier" and a third was someone who came forward after the May 29 broadcast.

The other person was "the source of this story."

The row over Mr Gilligan's story continues to be the worst dispute between Downing Street and the publicly funded broadcaster in decades.

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