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PERMANENT UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE

D/PUS/12/3 (278)

4 July 2003

Dear David,

ANDREW GILLIGAN AND THE SINGLE SOURCE

An official in the MOD has volunteered that he had a discussion with Andrew Gilligan on 22 May, one week before Gilligan's allegation about the interference in the production of the September dossier and the '45 minute story'. He is an FCO official seconded to the MOD's Proliferation and Arms Control Secretariat, with a long history of authorised dealing with the press in the course of his duties, though not in this case.

He was interviewed today by his line manager and my Personnel Director for two hours. The official claims that he met Gilligan to discuss Gilligan's experiences in Baghdad because he believed it would be helpful to him in his own role as a BW expert with long scientific/academic association with the Iraqi weapons programme, past experience as a UN Inspector and an expectation that he would be returning to Iraq to debrief Iraqis associated with their WMD programme shortly. It would appear, from what he has told us, that their discussion touched on some of the issues subsequently referred to by Gilligan in the press in a number of ways:

- In response to a question from Gilligan about the failure of Iraq to use WMD and the inability to find them, he said that conditions early in the war were not favourable and that there were command and control problems subsequently, and that the small arsenal of WMD remaining would be difficult to find without human information;
- on the issue of the 45 minutes, raised by Gilligan, he said that he did not know to what it refers (not having access to the intelligence report);
- asked why it should be in the dossier, he said that he replied "probably for impact";

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on the role of Alistair Campbell, he said he was unable to comment (not being involved in the process).

My immediate reaction was that this must be the "single source" to whom Gilligan referred to in his testimony to the FAC as the origin of the story that the Government exaggerated intelligence contained in the September dossier. Certainly, his comments to Gilligan could have been incorporated into Gilligan's 29 May story. However, closer examination, following today's interview suggests that this would not necessarily be a reliable conclusion. A significant element of the information that Gilligan attributes to this source in his FAC testimony would not have been known to this individual: he was not, for example, involved in, or claims to have been involved in, the intelligence component of the dossier or the process of the dossier's compilation. There are also discrepancies, over the circumstances of the meeting, the length of their relationship, and, indeed, about the nature of the individual. Gilligan claims that this source was a senior official in charge of drawing up the dossier. This official – although an acknowledged expert on Iraqi WMD – patently was not so involved, nor does he subscribe to views attributed to Gilligan's source.

So, there are three possibilities

- (a) that Gilligan has embellished this official's meeting with him, but that he is the 'single anonymous source',
- (b) that Gilligan's source is someone else,
- (c) that no one 'source' exists and is in fact a hotchpotch of comments from numerous individuals and articles.

In the case of (a), we would have the strongest possible reason for publicly correcting the misrepresentation made by Gilligan in the interests of factual accuracy. However, we do not have sufficient evidence to reach such a conclusion with any degree of safety. The official himself is adamant that he is not the single source. Were we to accuse Gilligan and the BBC of misrepresenting the official's remarks, it would be easy for Gilligan to claim that his source was someone else and that the Government was pursuing a vendetta.

For these reasons, I do not recommend that we use what the official has told us to seek to correct the public record further.

I do, however, believe it necessary to have defensive material available should the story leak. Of this there must be a possibility. The official himself says he came forward, not because he considered that he was the source of Gilligan's information, but because a contact in RUSI suggested that Gilligan's evidence to the FAC looked as if it drew on the sort of comments he might make about Iraq's CW and BW capability. In general, there must, therefore, be some speculation already. Contingent lines have, therefore, been prepared by officials here. These are enclosed

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I should add that the official has clearly breached the MOD's rules about unauthorised contact with the media. There is no reason to suspect a breach of the OSA or compromise of security information, but discipline is being reinforced

I am copying this letter to Andrew Turnbull, David Manning (No.10), Michael Jay (FCO), Eliza Manningham-Buller (Security Services) and John Scarlett (JIC).

{Signed}

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