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PERMANENT UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE

D/PUS/12/3 (279)

5 July 2003

Dear David,

ANDREW GILLIGAN AND THE SINGLE SOURCE

Since my letter to you yesterday afternoon, there has been a further development which points more strongly to our official as being the "source" for the Gilligan allegation about the dossier (albeit with plenty of room still for the possibility of embellishment from other sources and misrepresentation by the journalist).

Today's Times carries an article by Tom Baldwin which contains further hints as to Gilligan's informant. There are three new pointers, specifically:

- "BBC journalists have been told that Mr Gilligan's anonymous source is among the 100 British intelligence and weapons specialists currently in Iraq as part of the ISG"
- "Attempts to contact...source in the past month to ask supplementary questions has proved unsuccessful because of the nature of his position"
- Asked if now based abroad the executive replied "Something like that".

Although the official is not in Iraq at present I understand that he was there recently, after his conversation with Gilligan on 22 May and was planning to visit again later this month as an expert helping with the work of the Iraq Survey Group searching for WMD. The fact that the BBC are uncertain of his precise whereabouts, is consistent with the official's statement at the MOD's interviews yesterday that he has had no contact with the BBC since 22 May. Gilligan will have been aware of his general plans to visit - the official states that this was the reason why he agreed to meet Gilligan in the first place - but the cutting of contact since then would explain the BBC's lack of precision in their knowledge about the exact timings of his presence in Iraq itself.

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There remain many discrepancies between Gilligan's account of what he claims to have been told by the official and the official's own version of what transpired. We still cannot exclude the possibility that the main source, or other sources, are elsewhere. But it may be possible to explain and reconcile at least some of the mismatches. An official who denies having had access to the intelligence reporting or a hand in the production of the intelligence part of the dossier, as the official does, may nevertheless have said enough based on his expert knowledge of the earlier Iraqi programme, for someone of Gilligan's methods to claim that the official discredited the "45 minutes" intelligence eg by stating that such a high level of readiness did not correspond to the Iraqi systems of which he was aware.

Records of the MOD's interview with the official are still being prepared. I have asked that they be forwarded to us as soon as possible. But I wanted you and colleagues to be aware of this development immediately. The Times story today, whether accurate or not, will increase the likelihood that over the weekend other journalists will indeed identify and name the BBC's source as our official. (He is as I indicated in my earlier letter well known in media/academic circles)

There are also considerations, as we discussed yesterday, whether the Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman should be informed of what we now know, however inconclusive, before their report is published on Monday. And there is the question of whether this plays into the continuing impasse between the Government and the BBC.

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

Yours ever,
Ken
→

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