

Witness statement of Sir John Major to the Leveson Inquiry

Second

Exhibit SJM 11

Dated: 31 May 2012

**IN THE MATTER OF THE LEVESON INQUIRY INTO THE CULTURE, PRACTICES
AND ETHICS OF THE PRESS**

SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF SIR JOHN MAJOR KG, CH, PC

I, **SIR JOHN MAJOR KG, CH, PC**, of PO Box 38506, London SW1P 1ZW will say as follows:

1. Subsequent to the submission of my written statement dated 14 May 2012, and in particular paragraphs 16 and 32 et seq., I have found a letter in my personal archive files which illustrates my concern at the way in which some political appointees are able to abuse their role as Government press secretary or special adviser.
2. My letter was written in June 2008 to the then Cabinet Secretary, Gus O'Donnell, and refers to the actions of one particular special adviser employed by Gordon Brown during his time as Chancellor – and later as Prime Minister – which illustrates the interaction between some special advisers and some members of the press. It was written in response to what I believed to be an unacceptable pattern of behaviour, and not as the result of a single event.
3. The purpose of my letter was to warn the then Cabinet Secretary that, if I became aware of any further untruths being made, I would not hesitate to respond publicly and name the special adviser concerned. I hoped that my action would also alert the Cabinet Secretary to behaviour which – in my own view – fell far below the standard to be expected from those who are funded by the public purse.

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4. The letter, I believe, is self-explanatory. I exhibit a copy at **SJM11**.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this Witness Statement are true.

Sign



Sir John Major

Dated: 31 May 2012

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AND ETHICS OF THE PRESS**

EXHIBIT SJM11 TO THE SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT

OF SIR JOHN MAJOR KG, CH, PC

PERSONAL

30th June, 2008

You will recall the unhappy episode in 2005, when you were at HM Treasury, regarding the release of papers relating to Black Wednesday under FOI.

My office was, at that time, given a very clear steer that Special Advisors to the then Chancellor of the Exchequer were briefing the Lobby that Norman Lamont and I were impeding publication of these documents. This was – as you know – totally untrue, and personally damaging to both myself and Norman Lamont. I know that you shared my concern at this flagrant disregard for the proper conduct of Government and took steps, together with the then Cabinet Secretary, to ensure it was never repeated.

It is, therefore, with some dismay that I write to you now, following a similar episode last week, in relation to the withdrawal of Mr Mugabe's Honorary Knighthood.

Let me, in the first instance, express my thanks for your and Peter Ricketts' offices taking the trouble to call mine in advance of this announcement being made. This courtesy was much appreciated.

PERSONAL

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As you may know – over the past few months this matter has been somewhat frustrating for me:

- First, although much press comment has been based on the (entirely false) assumption that I, myself, awarded this Honour to Mugabe, I have resisted either correcting this – or, indeed, commenting on it in any way –

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- Second, for almost a year, the Conservative Party has been pressing the Government for the Honour to be withdrawn and – understandably – sought my public endorsement of this position. Although, privately, I was in full agreement with the Party’s line, I declined for the reason given above and have remained silent throughout, despite considerable provocation from the media. David Cameron, of course, entirely accepted my position [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- Third, last Wednesday morning your office alerted mine, in complete confidence, to the possibility of an announcement being made. You and I both know that that confidence would have been honoured to the letter by both parties. We waited for word of the announcement throughout the day.

That is the background.

PERSONAL

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In the early afternoon of last Wednesday, *before* any announcement had been made, Arabella Warburton received a call from Edward Llewellyn (PP/S David Cameron, MP) who reported that David Cameron's Press Secretary had just received a call from Andrew Porter of The Daily Telegraph, asking if it were true that (i) David Cameron had been "pressing" me to support publicly the Conservative Party position on withdrawal of Mugabe's Honour; (ii) I had "refused" to do so; and (iii) this had led to a "row" between myself and David Cameron. Edward Llewellyn was, unsurprisingly, dismayed at the leaking of a private conversation between our two offices, and the spin that had been put upon it.

Hot on the heels of Andrew Porter's call came calls from several other Lobby correspondents – directed both to David Cameron's office and my own – each of whom seemed to have been briefed *personally* by a Government spokesman, with a further twist to the tale. Specifically, they were being led to believe that the reason for the Prime Minister's procrastination in this matter was due to my private representations that the Knighthood should *not* be withdrawn.

As you may know, I issued an immediate and unequivocal denial of this story via the Press Association.

My office has subsequently learned – from two *entirely* independent sources – the identity of the spokesman concerned but since *on this occasion* I cannot be absolutely certain, I will refrain from naming him. I daresay, in any event, you might be able to hazard a guess.

PERSONAL

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However, this sorry episode raises – yet again – the extent to which those around Gordon Brown, both as Chancellor and now Prime Minister, are willing to lie – and I do not use that term lightly – to the media for party political advantage. I am certain this is a matter you will wish to address.

As we approach the next General Election – whenever that may be – I, for one, will not hesitate to correct any untruth that is peddled in order to damage either the Conservative Party or myself. Nor will I hesitate to identify publicly the source of such mischief.

If the public cannot trust those who speak on the Prime Minister's behalf, we are in a very sorry state. It is emphatically not good governance, and does profound damage to the nation as a whole, both here at home and overseas.

You may well wish to show this letter to the Prime Minister so that he might take the necessary action to ensure this does not happen again.

I am copying this letter to Peter Ricketts.

The Cabinet Secretary

PERSONAL