

Campbell, that dodgy dossier and the lies that cost David Kelly his life

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Alastair Campbell: Demanded 13 changes in the dossier

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But then, for Tony Blair and his colleagues, what was owed to Dr David Kelly in the way of decent treatment had never been much of an issue.

In the weeks before he was discovered dead in a wood in Oxfordshire on Friday, July 18, 2003, he was treated as a pawn in the Government's game against the BBC.

Even after he died, no one seemed particularly chastened. With his body barely cold that weekend, the Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon was photographed enjoying VIP treatment at Silverstone, and Blair's director of communications, Alastair Campbell, was working the phones to friendly Fleet Street editors to shore up his own position.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister's press spokesman Tom Kelly (certainly no relation) was busily advising journalists that the world-respected weapons inspector had, in fact, been a Walter Mitty character who had contributed to his own downfall.

Comparing the late Dr Kelly to a character famous for living in a world of fantasy was outlandishly cruel to his memory, given that it was his very passion for the truth that led to him becoming so ensnared in controversy in the final weeks of his life.

The scientist's only crime was to speak to BBC reporter Andrew Gilligan and voice his concerns, widely shared among his colleagues, that the facts on weapons of mass destruction were misrepresented in the notorious 'September dossier' produced by the Government to justify the invasion of Iraq.

Reading the transcript of Gilligan's broadcast today, the most striking aspect is the accuracy of the allegations he was reporting.

True, his language was in places not as tight as it could have been, but the BBC certainly didn't

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Murdered: Dr David Kelly showed no suicidal signs

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the world fall in on its head, as happened when the Hutton report was published in 2004.

With Alastair Campbell fanning the flames, the furore led to the resignations of the BBC's chairman and director general and forced its vicechairman Lord Ryder to make a public apology to the Government of such capitulation that I wanted to throw up when I heard it.

Yet during my investigation into Dr Kelly's death, I have obtained a secret report showing just how right he was to question the Government's integrity when he spoke to Andrew Gilligan.

It reveals the true extent to which Alastair Campbell misled MPs about his role in the whole affair.

At the end of June 2003, both Gilligan and Campbell found themselves called before the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee which was investigating the basis on which we had gone to war against Iraq.

Campbell appeared on June 25 and he went on the offensive, accusing the BBC of 'lies' and demanding an apology.

Later, his diary recorded his satisfaction with his work that day.

He felt a lot better for having 'opened a flank' on the BBC, yet it seems that at the very time he was accusing others of dishonesty, he was being less than forthcoming himself.

Some months later, the FAC carried out a confidential analysis showing that when asked what role he had played in shaping the dossier, there were notable differences between the account he gave them and the one he later presented to the Hutton inquiry.

The report was never released but, though it was made available only to those MPs who were on the committee and my official request for a copy was refused, I managed to obtain one through other means.

Running to some 14 pages, this paper shows, for example, how Campbell told the committee that the draft dossier had said that Saddam Hussein had sought to secure illicit uranium and that he had asked if any had actually been obtained.

Yet the memorandum from Mr Campbell to John Scarlett, the spy chief nominally in charge of the dossier, revealed that, as one of many suggested drafting changes proposed by Campbell, he had written: "Can we say he has secured uranium from Africa?"

This was transparently not an inquiry about the facts but a request for a change in the wording.

Most crucially, the document showed that Campbell failed to tell the MPs of the pressure he applied on the so-called '45-minute claim'.

In the draft dossier, the relevant sentence read: "The Iraqi military may be able to deploy chemical and biological weapons within 45 minutes of an order to do so."

It was Campbell who suggested changing the cautious 'may be able to deploy' to the definitive 'are able to deploy'.

This was hugely significant.

Strangely, Tony Blair had assured the Commons earlier that month that there was no attempt by any member of Downing Street staff to override the intelligence judgments of John Scarlett and his colleagues.

“That includes the judgment about the so-called 45 minutes,” he said.

Very plainly, that assurance was, as the quaint language of the Commons might put it, at variance with the facts.

These were far from the only changes made to the dossier at Campbell’s suggestion.

In just one memorandum, he requested 16 changes in all, of which 13 called for a strengthening of the language used, implicitly making judgments on intelligence matters far beyond his remit.

This was utterly unacceptable but around half of these suggestions were accepted by Mr Scarlett.

No wonder Lord Hutton suggested that the spy chief may have been ‘subconsciously influenced’ by political considerations.

Tony Blair’s foreword, written by Campbell and signed off by Scarlett, has some of the most assertive and hence most unjustified language in the dossier, and here, too, the editing is key.

How extraordinary to remember that, in the first draft, this foreword had Blair saying: “The case I make is not that Saddam could launch a nuclear attack on London or another part of the UK (he could not).”

This vitally important point, putting the claim in context, was removed from the final version.

The fact that the 45-minute claim related only to battlefield munitions, rather than long-range missiles of mass destruction, was obscured, and indeed Tony Blair, somewhat incredibly, claimed he only found out about it in the summer of 2004.

This was later contradicted by Robin Cook, his former Foreign Secretary.

He was clear that before the invasion of Iraq he had been briefed by John Scarlett that the weapons in question were only battlefield ones.

Mr Cook had discussed the matter with Blair so he was understandably ‘mystified’ to hear Blair say that he hadn’t understood the distinction.

‘Given that the Prime Minister was justifying war to the nation on the grounds that Saddam was a serious threat to British interests, he showed a surprising lack of curiosity as to what that threat actually was,’ Mr Cook said.

The implication is clear. Both Blair and John Scarlett did indeed know that Saddam had no long-range WMD capability, but chose deliberately to use language that allowed a contrary impression to be formed.

The Government's lack of remorse about this was apparent when Geoff Hoon was asked at the Hutton inquiry about the newspaper stories which had greeted the publication of the dossier in September 2002.

'BRITS 45 MINS FROM DOOM' and '45 MINUTES FROM ATTACK - dossier reveals Saddam is ready to launch chemical war strikes' were typical of the headlines.

None of this was remotely true, of course, and it is clear that nobody in the intelligence services or at the top of Government believed that it was.

One might have thought that they would have wanted to correct these very misleading stories.

Instead, they seemed happy for this alarmist picture to be painted, as a supremely indifferent Geoff Hoon demonstrated to Andrew Caldecott, counsel for the BBC at the Hutton inquiry.

The exchanges are worth recalling in full.

Caldecott: "Why was no corrective statement issued for the benefit of the public in relation to those media reports?"

Hoon: "I have spent many years trying to persuade newspapers and journalists to correct their stories.

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Former Prime Minister Tony Blair denied 'leaking' Dr David Kelly's name

"I have to say it is an extraordinarily time-consuming and generally frustrating process."

Caldecott: "But Mr Hoon, you must have been horrified that the dossier had been misrepresented in this way.

"It was a complete distortion of what it actually was intended to convey, was it not?"

Hoon: "Well, I was not horrified."

After a few more such exchanges, the BBC's counsel pointedly asked: "Do you accept that on this topic at least you had an absolute duty to try to correct it?"

"No, I do not," replied Hoon.

I said that Hoon was supremely indifferent. Actually, it was worse than indifference.

It was contempt. Contempt for the inquiry process, for the questioner and, most of all, for the public.

The reason there was no enthusiasm to correct the stories is, of course, because they were exactly what the Government wanted to see as it pursued a foreign policy which positioned Britain firmly on the back wheel of President Bush's pennyfarthing.

But this particular deception cannot be laid at Bush's door. The U.S. administration was quite happy to flout international law and talk brazenly of regime change in Iraq.

It was only in order to satisfy British sensitivities that the convoluted, complicated and essentially dishonest talk of WMDs was generated.

In return for telling the truth about all this, David Kelly found himself 'outed' as Gilligan's mole in a manner that, I believe, made him a target for assassination by aggrieved Iraqi opponents of Saddam.

After his death, Tony Blair said it was 'completely untrue' that he had authorised the leak of Dr Kelly's name.

He was asked why the Ministry of Defence had confirmed the name to journalists.

"That's a completely different matter once the name is out there," he said. Yet the name was not out there at all until the ministry released a series of clues clearly implicating Dr Kelly.

Blair made much the same defence on the issue at the Hutton inquiry, although it was an unusually hesitant and uncertain performance.

Julia Quenzler, the freelance court artist who covered the inquiry from start to finish for the BBC, told me that Blair, normally such a polished performer, was the most nervous of all those who gave evidence before Lord Hutton.

He was clearly very uncomfortable for some reason.

For his part, Geoff Hoon insisted that his department had 'made great efforts to preserve Dr Kelly's anonymity'.

Presumably this included the instruction to confirm his name to journalists if it was offered.

It was Hoon's decision to force Dr Kelly to appear in public before the Foreign Affairs Committee on Tuesday, July 15, 2003.

In this, he overruled Sir Kevin Tebbit, the senior civil servant at the MoD, who felt it would be

inappropriate.

According to reports, Hoon pulled rank in a rather unpleasant way, telling Sir Kevin that he would have to 'consider his future' if he refused to allow Dr Kelly to appear.

The FAC hearing – televised and taking place in the full glare of publicity – conjured up images of a Soviet show-trial.

Here was a witness, clearly intimidated and ill at ease, with his ministry minders sitting behind him.

Three days later Dr Kelly was dead.

Those who believe that he committed suicide suggest he may have buckled under the pressure of this appearance – but that is to ignore the fact that he was smiling as he left and was in good form before the Intelligence Committee the next day.

For reasons outlined throughout this series, I believe that he was murdered.

Not that the Government showed much sign of caring either way.

Within days of Dr Kelly's death, the Prime Minister and his wife had hit the headlines during a trip to China.

Their need to enjoy themselves clearly came ahead of any remorse for the death of one of Britain's most distinguished scientists.

While there, Mrs Blair astonished reporters when she took the microphone for a public rendition of The Beatles' When I'm 64.

Those watching could have been forgiven for wondering what her husband's choice of song would have been.

P. J. Proby's I Apologise would have seemed more than appropriate.

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