Questions Blair government must answer over death of whistleblower Dr Kelly

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The Blair government and sections of the media are seeking to obscure the essential questions regarding the death of whistleblower Dr David Kelly by focusing attention on the role of the BBC in supposedly exposing Kelly and therefore driving him to suicide.

Kelly was the microbiologist employed by the Ministry of Defence who told BBC journalist Andrew Gilligan and other reporters of his concerns over the misuse of intelligence material by the Labour government of Prime Minister Tony Blair in order to justify its predetermined aims to go to war against Iraq. He was found dead on July 18, from a slashed wrist sustained the previous day.

The attempts to blame the BBC for Kelly's death are ludicrous. It is the Blair Labour government that is responsible for his fate. Politically Kelly was moved to speak to Gilligan of the *Today* programme because he was opposed to the exaggerated claims and lies the government was employing regarding Iraq's weapons capability in order to justify its war aims. And it was the government, not the BBC, that forced Kelly into the public eye to divert attention into a sideshow over whether Gilligan's source (Kelly) had told him that Blair's Communications Director Alastair Campbell had personally "sexed-up" the September 2002 intelligence dossier—by inserting the claim that Iraq could deploy chemical and biological weapons within 45 minutes.

Such a claim had never been made by Gilligan, who only cited his source saying that Campbell had insisted on the inclusion of material considered to be unreliable by the security services because it came from a single uncorroborated source. But in order to embarrass the BBC and discredit Gilligan, the government turned things on their heads by attacking the Corporation for using a single source for their story and accusing them of a vendetta against Campbell. The government questioned whether Gilligan's source was reliable, whether the source had ever made the comments he reported, and whether the source was in fact a senior "intelligence" official.

In his *Today* report on May 29 and his June 1 article in the *Mail on Sunday*, the man now known to be Kelly was only ever described by Gilligan as "a senior official" involved in drawing up the dossier. He was later described as a senior "intelligence official" in one BBC statement. The distinction between an intelligence official and a senior official is on its face insignificant, given that Kelly was a high placed official on familiar terms with MI6 and its thinking. If not a paid spy himself, he worked closely with them throughout his career—first at the Porton Down biological weapons facility, then in debriefing Soviet defectors, then as a top weapons inspector in Iraq and then as one of the authors of the September dossier. But the government needed to muddy the waters as much as possible and seized on this distinction to do so.

For the government's diversion to work, it became imperative that Kelly was exposed and that he also hopefully made statements that helped undermine the BBC.

Events unfolded in the following way:

On June 30, Kelly writes a letter admitting to his bosses at the Ministry of Defence of having met Gilligan to discuss the September dossier. Nothing was done publicly with this information until it was politically beneficial to the government after the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) issued a report exonerating Campbell of having "sexed-up" the September dossier.

On July 8, at a lobby meeting of journalists, the MoD issued a statement saying that "an individual working

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in the MoD" had come forward "to volunteer that he met Andrew Gilligan."

The BBC still attempts to shield its source, saying that the MoD's description of the official does not "match" Gilligan's source.

On July 9, Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon releases a press statement saying that he had personally written to BBC Chairman Gavyn Davies asking them to verify whether the man named in his letter was Gilligan's source. In Hoon's press statement, Kelly is not named, but is described as having worked on the September dossier and not having been in the intelligence service. A Downing Street press officer, Tom Kelly, provides further biographical details later that day.

The government then tells journalists from the *Guardian*, *Financial Times*, the *Times* and others that they will not name Kelly, but will confirm his identity if named by the journalists. The *Guardian's* Richard Norton-Taylor offers three names and the MoD confirmed that one name—Kelly—is the man in question. His identity is now in the public arena.

At some point Kelly is questioned for three days by MoD officials and reportedly threatened with the Official Secrets Act. It is also alleged that he was threatened with losing his pension.

On July 15, Kelly appears before the Foreign Affairs Committee and tells it in halting terms that he believes he was not the main source for Gilligan's story. When asked whether he had told Gilligan that Campbell had transformed the September document, he replies evasively, "I cannot recall using the name Campbell in that context, it does not sound like a thing that I would say."

The BBC again refuses to confirm that Kelly was its source.

On July 16, Kelly appears in a private session of the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) where he is interrogated. That same day Blair tells MPs that the BBC should say whether or not Kelly is the source for their report.

On July 17 at 3:00 p.m., Kelly leaves his house in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, telling his wife he is going for a walk. He dies later that day.

The following questions must be answered regarding events leading up to Kelly's death:

* What pressure was placed on Kelly after he gave himself up?

* Was he threatened with the Official Secrets Act as has been reported?

* Was he asked to change his story in order to embarrass Gilligan and the BBC?

* Or was he forced to lie to protect himself from the witchhunt by the government and its FAC and ISC inquiries, or due to threats from within the MoD or his personal loyalty to it?

* Foreign Secretary Geoff Hoon, the Foreign Office and the Number 10 press office all conspired to make Kelly's name public. Was this sanctioned by Tony Blair, who is seeking to blame Hoon alone?

According to a report in the July 24 *Financial Times*, Blair knew of Kelly's identity a full week before it became public, which, the paper states, places him "firmly in the chain of events that led to Mr Kelly's death".

* Kelly's interrogation by the ISC was behind closed doors. What was said in this private session and will the transcripts be revealed?

* Given that Kelly was so highly placed, was he really acting without authorisation when he spoke to Gilligan and other journalists or was this sanctioned by others higher up within the MoD whom he sought to defend in his testimony to the FAC and the ISC?

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