

The Hutton Inquiry: British spy chief's testimony exposes lies on Iraq war

Julie Hyland
28 August 2003

Further evidence of the criminal conspiracy through which Prime Minister Tony Blair took Britain to war against Iraq has come to light.

On Tuesday, August 26, John Scarlett gave evidence to the judicial investigation headed by Lord Hutton into the death of leading scientist Dr. David Kelly. Scarlett is head of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), the body charged with compiling the September 2002 security report supposedly detailing Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Scarlett is favourite to become the next head of MI6. His evidence was regarded as crucial for the government in defending it from the charge that Blair's Director of Communications Alastair Campbell had "sexed up" the September dossier in order to justify a preemptive attack on Iraq.

Kelly had told BBC reporter Andrew Gilligan that Campbell had been responsible for inserting the claim that Iraq could deploy weapons of mass destruction within 45 minutes, despite serious misgivings within the intelligence services as to the veracity of the claim.

Previous evidence has proved that there was great disquiet amongst the security services over the 45-minute assertion, which had come from a single source. Nonetheless, Scarlett stuck to the line that it was he who was overall responsible for compiling the dossier, claimed that he did not know of any misgivings over the 45-minute claim and insisted that Campbell had not been responsible for making any changes.

Later during his evidence, however, Scarlett admitted that defence intelligence staff had presented a six-page list of concerns over the completed dossier to a meeting on the final draft on September 17. These were simply queries, according to Scarlett. "They queried whether it was right to include it [the 45-minute claim] as a judgement. They suggested that it should be qualified

in the executive summary with the words 'intelligence suggested' rather than being placed as a judgement," he said.

Numerous emails from Campbell and Blair's other advisers to Scarlett were shown to the inquiry, requesting changes to the dossier to make its assertions on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction harder. Scarlett claimed that the emails were purely intended to aid him with the presentation of the final draft. They were "comments" rather than "suggestions," Scarlett said, although later he accepted that they could be read as "requests."

The inquiry has already heard that Campbell, who is not even an elected MP, had chaired meetings of the JIC on September 5 and 9—an occurrence without precedent. The Foreign Affairs Committee investigation in July had specifically criticised the practise, whilst exonerating the government overall from charges of distorting intelligence material for its war ends. Scarlett, described by Campbell as his "mate," told the inquiry that he was happy for Campbell to chair the meetings because it concerned matters of presentation, not intelligence.

Scarlett was shown a September 11 email from Downing Street stressing that the government wanted "the document to be as hard as possible within the bounds of available intelligence" and "this is therefore a last (!) call for any items of intelligence that agencies think can and should be included. Response needed by 12.00 tomorrow."

Asked by James Dingemans QC, "it appears to betray an attitude that pressure is being brought to bear to dig out anything good by way of intelligence for the dossier," Scarlett said it was simply a request for more detail, something "entirely consistent" with what he wanted to do as the "person in charge of the whole

exercise.”

A further email from Campbell informed Scarlett that the prime minister had found one chapter in the draft had “less impact than the original.”

“I have amended the latest sections ... to bring out more clearly the current judgements,” the email continued. “We have strengthened language on current concerns and plans, including in the executive summary.”

If Scarlett thought he had done a good job in taking the heat off Campbell and Blair, he was very much mistaken. His testimony secured the most damning admission, which proved that the 45-minute claim had indeed been concocted to suit the government’s predetermined war plans.

Dissidents in the security forces had apparently been concerned that the 45-minute claim was from a single source, apparently an Iraqi general. However, Scarlett’s testimony made clear that, even worse than that, it was hearsay. The intelligence was not firsthand, but from “an established and reliable line of reporting ... quoting a senior Iraqi military officer in a position to know this information,” he said.

Within days of this piece of gossip first coming to light, on August 30, it was appearing in drafts of the British government’s supposed intelligence report on Iraq. By the final draft on September 19, the 45-minute claim was mentioned four times throughout the dossier. The executive summary stated that “as a result of the intelligence we judge that Iraq has ... military plans for the use of chemical and biological weapons, including against its own Shia population. Some of these weapons are deployable within 45 minutes of an order to use them.”

Blair’s foreword in the dossier was even more strident. The document “discloses that [Saddam Hussein’s] military planning allows for some of the WMD to be ready within 45 minutes of an order to use them,” the prime minister claimed.

The assertions were made next to details of Iraq’s alleged possession of al-Hussaid missiles, which the dossier claimed could strike British bases in Cyprus.

The possibility of weapons of mass destruction being used to threaten British interests became the casus belli for the government to join in the US-led attack on Iraq, in defiance of public opinion both at home and abroad.

With newspaper headlines screaming that Iraq could

attack within 45 minutes, Blair insisted that Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction could be overcome only by a preemptive attack on the country. Britain must not allow Iraq the opportunity to launch its chemical and biological weapons, Blair insisted.

But Scarlett told the inquiry that the 45-minute claim did not relate to chemical and biological weapons at all, but to ordinary armaments. The intelligence related to smaller range munitions, “battlefield mortar shells or small calibre weaponry,” Scarlett said, rather than warheads for long-range missiles as many had been led to assume.

The implications of Scarlett’s admission are far-reaching. It hardly needs pointing out that such a definition for possessing weapons of mass destruction would apply to every single country across the globe.

Just how the world was meant to be threatened within 45 minutes by Iraq’s deployment of small weaponry, Scarlett did not, and could not, explain.

There can be no better illustration of the utter contempt of the ruling elite for the democratic rights of both the British and Iraqi people. An entire country has been virtually destroyed, thousands of civilians killed and their land occupied by foreign invaders—all justified on the basis of lies and dissembling by a clique of government officials and unelected advisers conspiring behind the backs of the population to drag the country into war.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact