

Britain: Blair was responsible for naming whistleblower Kelly

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Sir Kevin Tebbit, permanent secretary at the Ministry of Defence, has made the damning admission that Prime Minister Tony Blair oversaw the meeting on July 8 that agreed procedures that would lead to the government scientist Dr. David Kelly's identity being disclosed to the media.

Kelly had apparently taken his own life just days after he was "outed" as the source of BBC journalist Andrew Gilligan's report on Radio 4's "Today" programme that the government had "sexed up" intelligence material to justify its plans for war against Iraq.

Tebbit had previously given evidence to the inquiry under Lord Hutton into Kelly's death on August 20, but an eye operation had caused his cross-examination to be delayed. The Hutton Inquiry resumed briefly on October 13 to enable the cross-examination of Tebbit, days after the counsels for the government, the Kelly family and the BBC had already made their closing summations.

Tebbit's admission came as he was quizzed by Mr. Gompertz for the Kelly family on who had taken the decision to draw up a "question and answer" procedure for the press, in which the government would confirm the scientist's name if asked directly by reporters.

The government claimed that this strategy had been adopted as it did not want to be seen to be misleading the public by withholding important information. Given that the Hutton Inquiry has been made necessary by the government's repeated efforts to mislead public opinion over the true reasons for its decision to go to war against Iraq—citing what are now known to be false intelligence claims on Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction—its protestations of honest intent regarding the leaking of Kelly's name is clearly absurd.

In reality, whilst not wanting to be seen to have deliberately "outed" the scientist as this would be regarded as a breach of protocol, the government was desperate to get Kelly's name into the public domain as

part of its efforts to discredit Gilligan and the BBC. Weeks after Britain joined the US in its unprecedented and illegal attack on Iraq, it was clear that Iraq did not possess weapons of mass destruction that could menace the world, much less be fired within 45 minutes as the Blair government's intelligence dossier of September 2002 had claimed.

It was in order to divert attention from this and other distortions that the government began its campaign against Gilligan for reporting that a leading official involved in drawing up the dossier (later revealed to be Kelly) had accused the government of manipulating security information to suit its predetermined war aims, and named Alastair Campbell, then Blair's director of communications, as personally responsible for inserting the 45-minute claim into the dossier.

By the time Blair chaired the July 8 meeting, Kelly had already come forward to his line manager at the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to admit that he had spoken to Gilligan and that he may be partially responsible for the "Today" report—although he denied making any accusations against Campbell. The government hoped that by forcing Kelly's name into the public domain it could use the scientist to discredit Gilligan's account.

Tebbit maintained that there was no intent to "out" the scientist, but his cross-examination revealed otherwise.

The MoD official confirmed the prevailing atmosphere at the time. Gilligan's accusation was "a hugely important issue, bearing on the credibility of the government and its intelligence institutions," he told the inquiry.

"The slur cast on the government was very severe. It had become the big public issue of the day. It had been focused on during the proceedings of the Foreign Affairs Committee [one of two parliamentary inquiries convened to stem accusations that the government had distorted intelligence material]. Indeed, it was one of the reasons he

agreed or decided to have an investigation in the first place. Therefore this was a fundamental issue and question.”

It is now known that Kelly had not told the MoD the truth of his discussion with Gilligan. During the inquiry BBC “Newsnight” reporter Susan Watts confirmed that in a separate interview with her, the scientist had named Campbell as responsible for “sexing up” the dossier. But the government took Kelly’s denials as an opportunity to press its case against the BBC. With the Foreign Affairs Committee about to release its findings exonerating Campbell of any wrongdoing, Blair decided to up the ante with the aim of quashing any further questioning over his decision to go to war.

Tebbit confirmed to the inquiry that the July 8 meeting, chaired by the prime minister, had agreed to “change the stance” over Gilligan’s report—i.e., to force the scientist’s name into the open. He also confirmed that whilst Kelly had agreed to a press statement citing that an anonymous source had come forward to admit speaking to Gilligan, he had not been made aware of the decision to confirm his name if it were put to press officers by journalists.

Within 24 hours of that meeting Kelly had been named in the media, enabling the government to force the scientist to testify before both the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Intelligence and Security Committee on July 15 and 16. In those meetings, the first of which was televised, Kelly continued to claim that whilst he had met with Gilligan he had not made any charges against Campbell.

With the FAC deciding that further investigations had to be made into the scientist’s contacts with the press, however, Kelly disappeared from his home on July 17. His body was found, with a slashed wrist, in the countryside near his home on July 18.

Tebbit’s admissions are damaging on two counts.

In the first place, the Hutton inquiry was convened in order to bring under control factional warfare raging within the British establishment over Blair’s policy towards Iraq rather than expose the truth of that policy.

To this end the inquiry has sought to confine questioning to the narrow issue of who, if anyone, should be held responsible for Kelly’s apparent suicide.

The government strategy appeared to be to hang Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon out to dry as a scapegoat in order to save Blair’s neck. But Tebbit’s submission made clear that it was Blair, not Hoon, who took charge of the scientist’s fate. Tebbit revealed that no one from the Ministry of Defence had been present at the meeting

chaired by Blair where it was agreed to confirm the scientist’s name. When he had arrived, Blair had told him the meeting was already over and he would be briefed later by Jonathan Powell, Downing Street’s chief of staff.

“The government, rather than the Ministry of Defence, felt the need (to issue a statement),” Tebbit said.

Tebbit’s statement catches the prime minister out in yet another lie. When he gave evidence to the inquiry in August, Blair acknowledged he was at the July 8 meeting and took full responsibility for the strategy agreed at it under the direction of the MoD. Blair presented this as a magnanimous gesture on his part, rather than an acknowledgement that he had driven forward the policy towards Kelly. And just hours after hearing of Kelly’s suicide, during a trip to the Far East, Blair had vehemently denied that he had authorised Kelly’s name be made public.

Blair’s lies over Kelly result from his lies over Iraq and the case for war. The government took the measures it did against the scientist in an effort to conceal the fact that it had deliberately misled the British public as to the threat posed by Iraq, and that it had trampled over the democratic rights of both the British and Iraqi people in order to launch a premeditated war of aggression.

In the last week, former Cabinet member Robin Cook has publicly confirmed that Blair knew Saddam Hussein possessed no weapons of mass destruction prior to his decision to support the US-led war.

By any criteria, the British prime minister is guilty of war crimes. All of the government’s actions—from the plagiarised dodgy “intelligence” dossiers, through to its decision to out Kelly—were aimed at concealing this fact. By piling one falsehood on top of another, Blair hoped to bury the original lie.

All of Lord Hutton’s efforts will not be able to conceal this fact, though no doubt the judge will do his best. Hutton has announced that his final report will be delayed, perhaps by several months. Initially due in November, the judge has said his findings will probably not be ready until next year—presumably to give him time to engineer a whitewash with a hope of success.



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