

TRANSCRIPT

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Jon Snow: Well now we are joined by Alastair Campbell. a rare moment, thank you for, for coming in. This row between you and the BBC, I mean, many will see it as a diversionary tactic to prevent people actually seeing the real issue here which is that MPs are not getting to the root of whether in fact the intelligence we were provided with was the real intelligence provided by the intelligence services

Alastair Campbell: Well if people wish to see it as a diversionary tactic they may. The media are constantly telling people never to take things at face value. This isn't a row between me and the BBC this is an attempt by the Government to get the BBC to admit that a fundamental attack upon the integrity of the Government, the Prime Minister, the intelligence agencies, let alone people, the sort of, evil spin doctors in the dark who do their dirty works in the minds of a lot of journalists, let them just accept for once they have got it wrong. The allegation, let's just understand what this allegation amounted to, and these weasel words in Richard Sambrook's letters, letter today (indistinct) says to me we didn't make the allegation we reported a source making the allegation. What does that say about journalism? You've been a journalism for decades, I was a journalist for quite a long time, I respect a huge number of journalists including many at the BBC.

JS: But I have to say .

AC: ... but they're now saying I, you can say anything you want on the television because somebody said it to you, doesn't matter if it's true ..

JS: yes ...

AC: doesn't matter if you check it, doesn't matter if it's corroborated .

JS: however the BBC's ...

AC: you can say it

JS: the BBC's riposte to you is very reasoned. It is set in the context of all the other information which was in the public domain, it's entirely consistent with that information. It credits the Guardian, the Observer, the Independent, the Times, I mean, most of Fleet Street had similar accounts of what intelligence sources were telling them. The BBC doesn't seem to be out of step with anybody else

AC: The BBC in their letter to me, and it's fascinating, they have post facto justification of a story by citing sources in newspapers which wrote stories subsequent to their, to the story that they had done. Some of those stories I know for a fact are incorrect. One of them, there's no point going through all the detail I think the public are probably bored rigid with this already, one

of those stories I know for a fact is wrong and I've addressed in evidence to the select committee.

JS: *I think the public is more likely to be concerned at the extraordinarily intemperate language which is coming out on behalf of the Prime Minister in your name. 'The story was a lie, it is a lie*

AC: Correct.

JS: *... weasel words', weasel not, incidentally, spelt correctly, in consistent terms with the original ...*

AC: Well as I understand it .

JS: *fake dossier which you produced.*

AC: ... if I may say so, the statement that you're reading from was read to the Press Association so that, that I wouldn't get hung up on a spelling mistake by somebody who's type it although I know that you, you also Jon reported the four people in my office were responsible for writing the so-called dodgy dossier when they were not However put that to one side The reason that is weasel words is it does not answer the questions that I put I asked the BBC whether they were standing by the allegation they made, the BBC made as John Humphreys described it, the BBC made the allegation that we deliberately exaggerated, abused, distorted intelligence ...

JS: *And the answer to that question .*

AC: . the answer .

JS: *.. that you put to the BBC .*

AC: ... to the question ..

JS: *the answer to the question you put to the BBC, do they stand by it, the answer is yes. A robust yes*

AC: the answer, excuse me, that letter is about as robust as Blackburn Rovers were when they played Trelleborges. I'll tell you the, the answer to the question yes or no did we abuse British intelligence, the answer to that question is no It is a serious .

JS: *We don't know, the answer to that question is we do not know*

AC: excuse me, excuse me ..

JS: *And the reason we do not know is that there is obfuscation and diversion, part of which we're seeing right here played out before us The fact is MPs want to question the chiefs of the intelligence services and should be allowed to do so instead you're preferring, you the Government, are preferring a hole in the corner operation with an intelligence committee which is not held in public and which is answerable to the Prime Minister*

AC: Well part of the problem I alluded to in my evidence to the select committee is that a lot of journalists see their mission to discredit politicians and the political process You describe people like Ann Taylor, who chairs the Intelligence and Security Committee, as a hole in the corner operation, you're talking (indistinct) intelligence agencies about people who do very difficult, brave jobs for this country

JS: *You know very well that Ann Taylor was appointed by the Prime Minister .*

AC: Correct

JS: *is answerable to the Prime Minister and accountable to the Prime Minister.*

AC: No she submits here reports to the Prime Minister.

JS: *He has the right to publish .*

CAB/1/0369

AC: The Prime Minister has to take judgements about what is published on security and intelligence grounds

JS: *The point about the committee that is sitting here and that questioned you today, the day before ...*

AC: Wednesday ...

JS: *... on Wednesday and questioned the Foreign Secretary today is that it is one that is accountable to MPs selected by MPs and accountable to us as electors and that is the committee which should be allowed to get to the root of this issue and that surely is what the Government is preventing them doing?*

AC: Let me just say this about that I'm not going to talk about the FAC's inquiry because I don't think I should until they've concluded it I will, however, say this Donald Anderson as I understand it and his committee had a private session with Jack Straw today in which they will have discussed some of, some of these issues. I have submitted today to the committee, and I don't intend to discuss the contents at all, but I've submitted further answers to the questions that they asked me which go in some detail in to the intelligence issues and the specific question and the charge that I distorted British intelligence That I inserted a claim that was not true, that I knew it not to be true They are serious allegations and

JS: *But you've heard the Foreign Secretary himself tell that committee that that dossier was a Horlicks that the* .

AC: No sorry, again, deliberate conflation of two things ...

JS: *he said ..*

AC: (indistinct) correct yourself, correct yourself; it is not the same document do you accept that?

JS: *Which is not the same document?*

AC: You just said that the Foreign Secretary described the dossier as a Horlicks ..

JS: *The dodgy (indistinct) dossier?*

AC: Excuse me we were talking about the weapons of mass destruction dossier. This is the problem you, the people who .

JS: *I, I ..*

AC: ... have been opposed to this conflict from the word go are now seeking to main, to change the ground and to say the Prime Minister led the country to, in to conflict on a false basis and you're deliberately conflating (indistinct).

JS: *... the issue in play here today is absolutely that this war was fought on the basis of intelligence information. That intelligence information, firstly the charges that in the first document in September there were serious errors of fact, we now know ..*

AC: Sorry the first document in September there were serious errors of fact, and what were they Jon?

JS: *The Niger allegation in which the minister who was supposed to have signed the nuclear purchasing order had himself resigned many years before .*

AC: And do you know, you know do you Jon that the, that that was the basis on which British intelligence put that in the dossier, you know that do you because if you think that you are wrong There were no errors of fact in the, the WMD dossier in September 200 (indistinct) . .

JS: *The, the Niger source was nothing to do with us?*

CAB/1/0370

AC: .. excuse me it was another country's intelligence and the British intelligence put what they put in that dossier on the basis of British intelligence; get your facts right before you make serious allegations against Government and against intelligence agencies

JS: *Well one, one fact is, one fact is absolutely incontrovertible and that is that the second dossier, the dodgy dossier, was indeed just that and the last question ..*

AC: As I have acknowledged ...

JS: .. and ..

AC: .. as I have acknowledged ..

JS: .. *but you've not acknowledged*

AC: .. as I have admitted, let me just, let me just draw this contrast between myself, between the Government and the BBC. On Wednesday at that select committee I acknowledged we had made a mistake, I accepted responsibility for that on behalf of the junior, the, the official in my office who made ..

JS: *That, that is all a part of ..*

AC: .. let me finish the point

JS: .. *that's, that's a matter of record.*

AC: .. can I finish the point? The BBC, I'm all in favour of senior management defending ..

JS: *I want to ask you one last question because I don't think*

AC: .. well I want to finish the sentence

JS: .. *we're going to clarify this but I want one last question ..*

AC: .. I want to finish the sentence ...

JS: .. *the last question is*

AC: .. well you can ask the question but I'm going to finish the question.

JS: .. *you are now part of the story, when the Government's communications chief is himself part of the story isn't it time he resigned?*

AC: For heaven's sake the reason I am part of the story is that a BBC journalist made an allegation about me

JS: *Against whom the BBC believe you have a vendetta because he's caused you trouble*

AC: I have never, I have never met the guy. I have never met Andrew Gilligan, I don't have a vendetta against him. I do believe that anybody with an interest in good, decent journalism of which there is a huge amount in this country should understand that when allegations are made, when lies are broadcast, when, as that letter shows, there is not a shred of evidence to substantiate the allegation they should apologise and then we can move on, we can get focusing on the things that really matter to your viewers out there which are the public services in the country, the economy of this country and the foreign policy of this country. And this distraction ...

JS: *Given, given ..*

AC: .. created ..

JS: .. *given the mistake, given the mistake ..*

AC: ... created by the BBC ...

JS: ... *that you've, you've admitted regarding the second dossier have you offered your resignation?*

CAB/1/0371

AC: No I haven't Jon and what's more that's a further attempt to conflate the two issues. In contrast to the BBC I have acknowledged we made a mistake, I have apologised on behalf of the Government. Now the BBC should acknowledge they've made a mistake and they should apologise to the Government then we can move on.

JS: *Alastair Campbell thank you very much for joining us.*

End

CAB/1/0372