

SOURCE

Stephen Mitchell

From: Kevin Marsh
Sent: 09 June 2003 01:31 PM
To: Stephen Mitchell
Subject: Campbell letter

I started to look at this point by point, but it's all drive! and, frankly, it'd be easy to get as confused as Campbell is. The man is flapping in the wind.

I'm looking back now at what we said on 24 September when the dossier was published - as ever, the recording has gone missing, probably lost in the multitude up in Mark's office

The key facts are these

We stand by the original (29 May) story and the processes that got it to air. Andrew's source is known to us: it is a source that has been utterly reliable in the past.

Apart from the one key fact - the "45 minute" claim - the rest of what the source told us on this occasion (about unease within the security services) was consistent with what we were hearing from a number of sources within the security services

I made an editorial judgement, balancing what I knew from my own sources and the hitherto reliability of the source with all the caveats in the producer guidelines - helpfully listed by Campbell; and I decided that the balance lay in favour of going with the story

That decision was vindicated within 2 hours and 10 minutes of first airing when Defence Minister Adam Ingram confirmed, live on air, that the "45 minute" report was single sourced and uncorroborated. He said

"Well, that (45 minute claim) was said on the basis of a security source information. Single sourced - it wasn't corroborated"

Since then, other sources including a former Cabinet Minister have confirmed that

Downing Street has never explicitly denied the central charge - that the "45 minute" claim - was single sourced, though Campbell appears to be denying it now, for the first time, in this letter. I'd be grateful if he'd confirm he is now doing that.

Specifically, on the day we broke the story, there was no official denial. Downing street said that.

"Not one word of the dossier was *not entirely* the work of the intelligence agencies"

And although that is not consistent with the Foreword to the dossier, written by the Prime Minister in which he says in first line that the dossier is...

"based, in large part, on the work of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC)"

... it does not address the central charge of our story. We have never claimed that anything was inserted into the dossier that was not the work of the security services - simply that uncorroborated intelligence was given prominence and that members of the security services were uncomfortable with that

Subsequent "denials" have been anything but: No10 has denied "inventing"... "making up"... "putting pressure on the security services"... The trouble is, we have never accused it of doing any of these things.

Even in his current letter, Campbell slips and slides all over the place. He writes.

"Adam Ingram and the Prime Minister, the latter having consulted the Chairman of the JIC, have made it absolutely clear that this piece of information was not inserted into the dossier by No 10. It came from an established and reliable line of reporting and was consistent with previous intelligence assessments. Its use was approved by the JIC after going through the usual rigorous process of assessment."

Fine - except this does not withdraw Adam Ingram's concession on 29 May that it was "single sourced - it wasn't corroborated." Nor does it say anywhere that it was *not* single sourced

Since the original story broke, BBC journalists and those from other media organisations have been briefed by their own - different - sources to the effect that the original story was correct.

Incidentally, we must take issue at Campbell's suggestion that we did not "offer any opportunity to reply to some very serious allegations being made about the reliability of the *dossier produced by the JIC*" (My italics). As I set out above, the dossier was *not* produced by the JIC - it was produced by Downing Street "based in large part on the work of the JIC". Mr Ingram, through his assistants at the MoD, were made aware the day prior to his interview on 29 May of the story and the assumption on both sides was that he would respond to it. That is normal business - though it does seem there may have been some breakdown of communications between the MoD and No 10.

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