

Julie O'Brien

From: Ian Gleeson
Sent: Wednesday, August 06, 2003 2:05 PM
To: Julie O'Brien
Subject: FW: Dr David Kelly: Press Office handling of media bids for contact with Dr Kelly

Julie, Copy of James's minute. Others to follow.

Ian

-----Original Message-----

From: James Paver
Sent: 21 July 2003 15:11
To: Stephen Pattison; Alp Mehmet
Cc: Martin Duffy; Edward Oakden (London); Ian Gleeson; John Williams (London); Peter Reid * Washi -Conf; Peter Collocott; Geoffrey Adams; Michael Wood; Patrick Lamb; Tim Dowse; Peter Spoor; Mark Peters; Colin Smith
Subject: Dr David Kelly: Press Office handling of media bids for contact with Dr Kelly

Stephen

I understand that you are tasked with putting together a chronology of contacts with David Kelly. This is my recollection of my own contacts with him in handlings media bids for him, and the rationale behind the judgements the Press Office made on whether to agree to bids. For the period covered by this minute (Jan 2002 to date) I have been press officer for NPD, the main contact department for Dr Kelly within the FCO.

The need for Press Office involvement in the process was because of Dr Kelly's status as a civil servant. Accordingly, the normal rules about seeking clearance applied. But given his technical expertise in CBW we recognised that there would be occasions where a bid was for him in this expert capacity rather than as a civil servant, and took a judgement accordingly.

The pattern for handling bids for interviews or background briefings with Dr Kelly was that he would alert us to bids made direct to him, or those bids would come direct to us and we would alert him. FCO Press Office consulted NPD, and advised Dr Kelly accordingly of our decision on whether he could take up any bid. On the whole, where the request was for Dr Kelly to give a strictly technical explanation of a particular weapon and its effects, we would approve, provided that he made clear that he was speaking in his capacity as a technical expert in the subject and not as a civil servant (ie that whoever interviewed him did not bill him a civil servant). Where the bid included any element of comment/speculation/assessment re Iraq (or any other country) and its WMD holdings, we would decline or advise of any areas into which he should not stray.

The system relied on prompt and comprehensive notifications of bids. To the best of my knowledge this system worked, in that there was not an occasion where I can recall embarrassment to HMG following an authorised interview or background briefing.

From recollection I first had contact with Dr Kelly about bids for him in early 2002, as the media focus on Iraq's WMD grew. The number of bids rose with increasing media speculation about the possible publication of a dossier, where Dr Kelly's detailed knowledge of the history of inspections was of interest to media. It reached a peak following the Dr Kelly's appearance alongside the Foreign Secretary on 25 September before the FAC, which was preparing a report on the War Against Terrorism. I cannot recall with any precision the number of bids at the peak of interest. But it was even then a relatively modest figure.

Bids tailed off almost completely in 2003. My only dealing with Dr Kelly that I can recall since New Year was about 2-3 months ago when an Australian company asked for him to take part in a documentary, which we eventually agreed.

At no point was I (or anyone else in Press Office) contacted by Dr Kelly about the series of background contacts he had with media which have since emerged in the recent Gilligan crisis. I do not know whether there were similar contacts without our knowledge for the entire period covered by this minute.

James

CAB/4/0008