

[Select Committee on Foreign Affairs](#) [Written Evidence](#)

Memorandum from Alastair Campbell

1. I am grateful to the FAC for the opportunity to be able to explain how the Government has sought to handle communications issues concerning Iraq.

2. Overall strategy on Iraq was laid down by the Prime Minister and other Cabinet Members responsible for policy following agreement in Cabinet and, as matters progressed, endorsement by the House of Commons. My role as the Prime Minister's Director of Communications and Strategy was to help take our communications strategy forward. I chaired the cross departmental Iraq communications group, comprised of senior officials from No 10, FCO, MOD, DIFD, Cabinet Office, SIS, DIS, CIC. This met weekly to discuss and review forward communications strategy. We continue to meet, though not every week. I also chaired the regular morning media meeting of key departments to help take the strategy forward on a day to day basis.

3. From where I sat, what the Government was seeking to communicate was that a brutal, Iraqi regime possessed and had used WMD, was in persistent defiance of the UN, and a threat to the region and the stability of the world. I saw a Prime Minister determined to play his part in dealing with the issue, who was convinced that the UN was the place to resolve it and who worked flat out to achieve that, because he was determined to avoid conflict if at all possible. If conflict came, he was determined that it should be prosecuted with real vigour to force the collapse of the regime and help rebuild Iraq for the Iraqis. And he was concerned throughout that Cabinet, Parliament and the country were properly informed and engaged in debating and deciding the policies that flowed from these positions as the situation evolved.

4. My role was to help the Prime Minister and his ministerial colleagues communicate this to various audiences, in the UK and overseas.

5. Much of the debate on the issues under investigation by the Committee concerns two documents presented by the Government on Iraq.

6. It is important to separate out these two documents. They are not

FAC | 3 | 0122

NOT USED

FAC|3|0123

comparable in terms of their scale, breadth or intended impact. The first was vital in explaining the reasons for the Government's concern about Iraq, the WMD programmes and its persistent refusal to accept UN obligations. The second was not.

7. The first, the dossier entitled "Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, the Assessment of the British Government", was a very substantial document which was presented to a recalled House of Commons by the Prime Minister in September 2002. It involved detailed planning and preparation over many months. Initially, the FCO was in the lead on this project. However, once the decision was taken that intelligence should form the basis of the dossier, the Joint Intelligence Committee took the lead on it and its Chairman took responsibility for drawing up the contents which were regularly reviewed as the document evolved. The Prime Minister's officials, and senior FCO officials were involved with the Chairman of the JIC in discussions upon the content, the planning of the document, and its presentation. That has never been an issue. I had several discussions with the Chairman of the JIC on presentational issues arising from the dossier and, in common with other officials, made drafting suggestions as the document evolved. I also submitted to him suggestions made by the Prime Minister on a draft which he read. The Prime Minister's suggestions, and mine, were for the JIC Chairman to accept or reject as he saw fit. It was the Chairman of the JIC who signed off the final version of the dossier.

8. We were conscious of the fact that it was a major break with precedent for the intelligence community to allow so much of their information to be put into the public domain in this way and for them to co-operate so closely with us on a document which itself was a response to the considerable Parliamentary and public interest in the reasons for the Government's concern about Iraq and its WMD. This break with precedent was not something that we took lightly, as I know the Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator, the Chairman of the JIC and the Heads of the Intelligence Agencies involved would acknowledge. I emphasised at all times both in our discussions and in any written outcomes of our various meetings circulated within the system that nothing should be published unless the JIC and the Intelligence Agencies were 100% happy. This, allied to the fact that the dossier was being presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister, meant that the utmost care was taken by all involved in its preparation.

9. The intelligence judgements were entirely those of the JIC and there was no question of anyone seeking to override them. The allegation, repeatedly reported by a BBC correspondent, and subsequently by others on the BBC and elsewhere, that I, or anyone in Downing Street, exaggerated and distorted intelligence to help persuade Parliament and the country to go to war, with all that

FAC/3/0124

entailed for the loss of UK and Iraqi lives, is totally untrue. It is hard to think of a more serious allegation in this context and it is false. The allegation on the BBC that we abused intelligence in an attempt to "sex up" the dossier is simply untrue, and I have the support of the Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator, the Chairman of the JIC, and the Heads of the Intelligence Agencies involved, in saying that. The claim in the original BBC story that the "45 minute" command and control point was put in at my or No. 10's insistence against the wishes of the Intelligence Agencies is also false, and I say that with their support too. I have been privately seeking, without success, acknowledgement from the BBC's Director of News that this story is not true. It is a serious allegation not just against me but against the JIC and the Intelligence Agencies, in that it suggests they would have allowed something to be said in their name which was not a true representation of what they believed. I should add that, with the full support of the JIC chairman, we issued a denial of the BBC story an hour after it was first broadcast at 6am on 29 May. This denial was barely mentioned in the many subsequent BBC reports. Even when it was emphasised that this was a denial by the leadership of the intelligence community, this had no impact upon the BBC's coverage.

10. These allegations were wrong. It is doubly wrong, when the entire leadership of the UK intelligence community has made it clear that the stories were wrong, that the BBC persists in defending their accuracy, and continues therefore to attack the integrity of the Government, the integrity of the JIC and Intelligence Agencies, and my integrity too.

11. The second document under investigation, "Iraq, its infrastructure of concealment, deception and intimidation," (February 2003) was intended as a briefing paper for journalists to inform them of the way in which the Iraqi state was dominated by its security apparatus and therefore well placed to conceal WMD. When new SIS intelligence material came to light, which was authorised for use in the public domain, which revealed the scale of the regime's programme of deception and concealment, it was my idea, as I recall, to base a briefing paper for the media upon it and this approach was agreed by the Iraq communications group in early January, and the paper worked on during that month. But compared to the WMD dossier presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister, this was nowhere near as significant, nor ever intended to be.

12. The WMD dossier published in September 2002 to Parliament received considerable attention around the world, as indeed we had planned for with a substantial print run, translated versions and a boosted website capacity across government. In contrast, the February 2003 briefing paper was given to the six representatives of the UK Sunday newspapers travelling on the Prime Minister's plane to a meeting with President Bush. It had very limited media attention, and

FAC/3/0125

the now controversial section based on the article by Dr Al-Marashi next to none. It was placed in the library of the House for the information of Members because on the day after the Prime Minister returned from the US he was making a statement to Parliament to update the House on Iraq. It is true that Secretary of State Powell referred to it in the US but the overall impact of this briefing paper was minuscule compared to the huge focus in many parts of the world on the WMD dossier. It was only when the "plagiarism" issue came to light that media and public attention grew.

13. It has been acknowledged by the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the FCO Permanent Secretary, me, and the CIC, that the procedures it went through were not adequate for such a paper. Material should not have been used without its provenance being clear and properly acknowledged. The briefing paper would have lost nothing had that been so; indeed, its accuracy has not been seriously challenged. That is, however, not the point. Strict quality controls were particularly important in view of the fact that there was intelligence-based material elsewhere in the document. That is why, once the provenance of all the material became known to us, we immediately acknowledged the error, discussed it widely at a senior level in Government, made clear that it should not have happened in this way and put in place new procedures. Where they related to the handling of any document with an intelligence input, these were agreed with the Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator. In addition, procedures were introduced with the CIC to ensure all material was properly sourced. As the Committee will be aware, following its initial examination of this, the Intelligence and Security Committee said in their report on the 10 June 2003:

"We have been assured that systems have now been put in place to ensure that this cannot happen again, in that the JIC Chairman endorses any material on behalf of the intelligence community prior to the publication."

14. The Prime Minister has said publicly that Dr Al-Marashi should have been acknowledged as a source, and that the journal in which his article was published, MERIA, should have been credited as the publisher, and this has been repeated by those who speak on his behalf.

15. As to how the mistake occurred, I understand that once the group I chair commissioned the paper from the CIC in January, the CIC approached various Government agencies and departments asking for material they had which related to the theme we had discussed. It was during this process that Dr. Al-Marashi's article of September 2002 in MERIA journal was submitted to the CIC. It was following this, in the CIC, during the third week of January that the material was simply absorbed into the briefing paper, without attribution, and it then formed the basis of Section 2. From that point on, everyone who was asked to comment on the paper assumed this information was

FAC | 3 | 0126

Government-sourced material. Thereafter editing changes were made in the normal way which explains why there are some differences between the article and the final text in the briefing paper. The changes were made because the officials making them believed they rendered the account more accurate. They were not aware they were commenting upon work which included parts of Dr Al-Marashi's article. The removal of the attribution was the mistake which we have acknowledged and I am happy to take responsibility for the briefing paper.

16. We are satisfied that our new procedures will minimise the risks of such mistakes being made in the future.

17. There is one other point I would like to draw to the FAC's attention.

18. It relates to the claim, first reported in the media on 7 February, and then repeated many times since, including in evidence to the committee, that the briefing paper was written by my staff in Number 10, including my personal assistant. This is untrue. The story naming the four people first appeared in the Guardian on 7 February. It said that the briefing paper was posted on the No.10 website at the end of January and alleged that these four junior civil servants had worked on the paper. First, I should point out that it was not posted until Monday 3 February. The four people named were a member of the support team in my Department, my PA, a member of our web-team, and a member of the CIC. The support team member's only role was to save the document onto the disk that we took on the flight to the US. My PA's only involvement was that she typed in changes that I made on the plane. The web-team member posted the paper on the No 10 website, and nothing else. The fourth person was a member of the CIC, and I have already explained their role in this. The reality is that the paper was commissioned by my group, prepared in the CIC, and signed off for use as a briefing paper for the Sunday papers on 31 January by me after I edited out repetitions and changed the title. I made the Prime Minister aware of the nature of the document and its intended purpose prior to the press office giving the paper to Sunday newspaper journalists the following day.

19. There was certainly no intention to do anything other than set out the facts about this aspect of the Iraqi regime.

20. To conclude, our communications strategy on Iraq has been based on the desire to explain as effectively as possible the Government's policy. Given the importance of the issue we have also sought to share with the public the best information and assessment available to us. I believe, in often difficult and controversial circumstances, that we upheld very high standards that reflected well upon the Prime Minister, the Government, the Intelligence Agencies

FAC | 3/0127

and those of us supporting the communications effort. The September WMD dossier was vitally important to our communications and I believe its integrity is beyond question. It did not "make the case for war". It set out the Government's best assessment at the time for Parliament and the public. The February briefing paper was far less important. Amid the many months of constant communications, including Parliamentary statements, debates and questions, visits at home and abroad, meetings, briefings, speeches, articles, interviews and regular updates for the media around the world and around the clock, I hope that the mistake made will be viewed in that context. It should not define the totality of our communications, nor legitimise the repetition of false allegations made on the BBC, nor obscure the fact that the Prime Minister led the country into conflict not because of a dossier or briefing paper but because of an Iraqi regime that refused to respect the will of the UN and disarm itself peacefully of its WMD.

21. I hope this is helpful and look forward to being questioned upon it.

Alastair Campbell

24 June 2003

[Previous](#)

[Contents](#)

[Next](#)

[Commons](#)

[Parliament](#)

[Lords](#)

[Search](#)

[Enquiries](#)

[Index](#)

© [Parliamentary copyright 2003](#)

Prepared 7 July 2003

FAC | 3 | 0128