

Campbell presses BBC to apologise over claim

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By James Blitz
and Tim Burt

Alastair Campbell, Downing Street's head of communications, yesterday intensified pressure on the BBC to apologise over its claim that he had "sexed up" a dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, demanding immediate answers to a series of questions on the issue.

Amid signs that the row was turning into the worst dispute between Downing Street and the BBC in decades, Mr Campbell wrote to Richard Sambrook, the director of BBC News and Current Affairs, hitting out at what he called "the BBC's refusal ever to apologise" when it made a mistake.

In his letter, Mr Campbell demanded to know whether the BBC was standing by its allegation that he had inserted into the dossier the claim that Saddam Hussein was capable of firing chemical and biological weapons within 45 minutes of giving an order.

Listing 12 questions for Mr Sambrook to answer "by the end of the day", he also asked whether the BBC was standing by its allegation that the dossier was changed "against the wishes of the intelligence agencies".

Last night, the BBC repudiated Mr Campbell's allegations. Mr Sambrook said: "We stand by our entire story. In my experience, this is an unprecedented level of pressure on the BBC from Downing Street. The BBC will respond properly to these matters, but not to a deadline dictated by Mr Campbell."

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