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# Blair Testifies on Iraq WMD Lies: Will He Resign?

by Mark Burdman

No sooner had British Prime Minister Tony Blair finished his appearance before the judicial inquiry headed by Lord Hutton, in London on Aug. 28, than most British media and informed observers highlighted one crucial moment, during the two and half hours of his testimony: Questioned about whether his office had "sexed up" its September 2002 dossier on "Iraqi weapons of mass destruction" to make the Iraqi threat seem more imminent and dangerous than it was, Blair mooted his own resignation. This was an "extraordinarily serious allegation," he said, "which, if it were true, would mean we had behaved in the most disgraceful way, and I would have to resign as Prime Minister."

He proceeded to spin out furious denials, yet his overall testimony provided convincing proof that he and his entourage were guilty as charged. The next day, his press spokesman, Alaistair Campbell, resigned.

Whatever may have been Blair's intent, he has probably sped up the process of his own downfall. Undoubtedly, this drama is being monitored extremely closely by U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney and his neo-conservative friends, of whom Blair has been the most reliable ally.

## Self-Incrimination

Blair's appearance was the inquiry's most dramatic moment since it officially began its work, on Aug. 11. He is only the second British Prime Minister in history to appear before a judicial inquiry. The Hutton inquiry was called to investigate the circumstances of the July 17 death, an apparent suicide, of Dr. David Kelly, Britain's foremost expert on Iraqi weapons. Kelly was the identified source, in a BBC "Today" program, of the "sexed up" charge. After that broadcast, Blair's team went into frenetic motion, against the BBC, and against Kelly himself. So, the inquiry has pursued two related questions. First, who forced the name of Kelly, who always worked quietly behind the scenes, into the public eye, leading to his being hounded mercilessly, and likely even threatened by those angered by his skepticism about the Iraq threat? Second, was the "sexed up" charge true?

Lord Hutton asked Blair to explain his foreword to the September 2002 dossier. Blair had written: "I am in no doubt that the threat is serious and current, that [Saddam] has made progress on WMD, and that he has to be stopped. . . . He has existing and active military plans for the use of chemical and biological weapons, which could be activated within 45 minutes." Blair responded to Hutton's queries: "I am very careful in my statement to make it clear what we were and were not saying. . . . The purpose of the dossier was to respond to the call to disclose intelligence that we knew, but at that stage, the strategy was not to use the dossier as the immediate reason for going to conflict."

This is a bald-faced lie; even his obfuscation with the qualifiers "at that stage" and "immediate," cannot hide the fact that, by his own implicit admission, his *intent was* to "use the dossier" as "the reason for going to conflict."

Blair said that he had squelched an earlier, March 2002 dossier on Iraq, because it would "enflame the situation too much to publish it at that stage." But by September, he decided to announce the publication of the dossier, because there was a renewed sense of urgency. He said that he had spoken to President George W. Bush by telephone, and the two men had decided to "confront the Iraq issue, devise a strategy, and get on with it."

In other words, the September 2002 dossier was designed to "get on with" war against Iraq. Guilty as charged! Follow your own advice: Step down, Tony Blair!

By the time Blair had arrived at the witness stand on Aug.

28, his regime had already been massively damaged, both by the findings of the Hutton inquiry itself, and by the anger in the U.K., at the growing numbers of British soldiers being killed in Iraq. New opinion polls showed a giant majority of the British population expressing an utter lack of trust in Blair and his government.

On Aug. 26, BBC reported that Jeremy Corbyn, a left-wing member of the British Labour Party, affirmed that the Kelly affair had become Tony Blair's Watergate. Corbyn stressed: "The longer this [Lord Hutton] inquiry goes on, the more e-mails appear, the more documents appear, the more damning evidence appears." Corbyn is a member of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour parliamentarians, whose leading light is former parliamentarian and Cabinet minister Tony Benn.

On Aug. 25, the London *Guardian* published a piece entitled, "PM Deeply Involved in Outing of Kelly," which asserted, based on "normally secret documents made public by the Lord Hutton inquiry," that "Tony Blair was heavily involved in the strategy that resulted in the outing of David Kelly, the weapons inspector who subsequently committed suicide. . . . A three-page document is headed: 'Meetings in the Prime Minister's study.'. . . Although Downing Street has admitted Mr. Blair had been kept informed, the documents show that he took part in an extraordinary series of high-level meetings . . . to discuss what to do about Dr. Kelly. Mr. Blair overrode the advice of his aides, to insist Dr. Kelly give advice to both the Foreign Affairs and Intelligence Committees. The documents reveal an obsessiveness at the heart of government over the affair, with hundreds of e-mails and ad hoc meetings devoted to the details on handling Dr. Kelly."

This extraordinary pressure on Kelly, one way or the other, is what drove the weapons scientist to his death.

In an effort at damage control, Blair averred to the inquiry that he does indeed "take full responsibility" for bringing Kelly's name into the public light, although he insisted that he acted in accordance with usual British civil service procedure.

## Dossier 'Unacceptable'

The Hutton inquiry has also brought out much evidence about how Blair's 10 Downing Street office skewed intelligence to get the war drive against Iraq going. On Aug. 25, the London *Independent* published testimony presented by Air Marshal Sir John Walker, a former chief of Defence Intelligence from 1991 to 1994, and deputy chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) during the September 2002 period in which the "Iraqi WMD dossier" was being composed. A document from Walker was made public, charging that the dossier was, in substance, a fraud, with the purpose of creating an "excuse" to go to war, rather than presenting a "reason" for war. Sir John also said that the Iraq war had already effectively started by around early September. In a note to the JIC, written July 2, 2003, Sir John had suggested that the change in the "no-fly operations," from defensive to offensive operations last Autumn, was because the United States and U.K. had already decided to "prepare the battlefield. . . . When was the decision taken to go to war? If this thesis bears examination, then the nation was committed to war, in the late summer, early autumn of 2002."

Sir John asserted that it was "unacceptable" for Blair to rely on a single source for the controversial claim that Saddam Hussein could deploy chemical and biological weapons within 45 minutes: "It was the immediacy of the WMD threat that convinced some MPs [Members of Parliament] to vote with the Government on the crucial decision on taking the country to war. As an ex-deputy chairman of the JIC, and chief of Defence Intelligence, I cannot credit that an assessment on which such an awesome decision rested, should be based on a single source. I find that inconceivable. I also find it unacceptable."

The *Independent* asserted that this is "perhaps the most scathing criticism of Mr. Blair by a former officer," and that "Sir John shared the concerns of his former colleagues in the Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) about the dossier." Already in the first hours of the Hutton inquiry, DIS senior figure Martin Howard presented evidence highly critical of the Blair dossier.

A close associate of Sir John Walker, himself a former high-level official in the Ministry of Defence, told *EIR* on Aug. 26, that "Blair is significantly responsible for this nasty mess we're in, in Iraq now, since he probably could have prevailed on the American President, back in that crucial time in September 2002, *not* to go to war with Iraq, if he had shown the elementary courage and self-confidence of a Winston Churchill. But instead, he did the opposite, and we're all now paying the price."

The Blairites' propaganda descended into farce, with the Aug. 26 testimony of Sir John Scarlett, chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee. The JIC coordinates all British intelligence services, on behalf of the Prime Minister, and Scarlett played a central role in composing the September 2002 dossier.

He was queried about Dr. Kelly's reported skepticism concerning the Blair government's claims about Iraqi WMD. Scarlett replied that Kelly was probably misinformed in assuming that the government was making claims about Iraqi missiles. Rather, the alleged threat related to "battlefield mortar shells or small calibre weaponry." He affirmed that the intelligence about Iraq's ability to mobilize weapons "within 45 minutes" did not relate to "warheads for missiles. . . . In fact, it was not; it related to munitions, which we had interpreted to mean battlefield mortar shells or small calibre weaponry quite different from missiles."

The Aug. 27 *Independent* ridiculed the claim, noting that "according to the experts, the normal definition of an international military WMD threat would not include battlefield mortars, and certainly not small calibre weaponry, even if they had chemical and biological stocks attached."