

# CounterPunch

September 16-30, 2003

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VOL. 10, NO. 16

## London Diary

### KELLY'S PAL MAI

BY ALEXANDER COCKBURN

LONDON: Despite the concentration on Kelly, there are still some very odd ends unaccounted for, regarding this career government man who once ran the British CBW center, Porton Down. Near the beginning of September the Murdoch-owned Times, strongly supportive of Blair, ran three or four stories nibbling at Kelly's odd relationship to Mai Pederson, an attractive Arab-American Kuwaiti woman from Kuwait who had been Kelly's translator when he was working as a UN inspector in Iraq in late 1998.

Pederson is a master sergeant in the USAF and according to the Times story worked at the Navy's Language School in Monterey, long known as a spy school. After Kelly was found dead on July 18 the Pentagon moved her to Virginia and then to a base outside Montgomery, Alabama. She won't speak to the press. Her ex-husband speaks to journalists in dramatic terms about her skills in eliciting information.

Now, 1998 was a time when the US and UK intelligence services were desperate for information about weapons programs in Iraq, also a time when the Iraqis charged accurately that the UN's inspection teams were riddled with US agents. According to colleagues Kelly was convinced in the late 1990s that Saddam was pushing forward with major programs in the CB warfare sector. He thus would have been a valuable target for Mai

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## Bush and Blair's Chickens: But No Poultry for the Press?

The postwar travails of the Bush and Blair regimes have been moving at roughly the same tempo. On the business of faked intelligence, the chickens have been slowly but inexorably coming home to roost, albeit with much irksome pomposity about some supposed new corruption of such intelligence estimates from former high standards. Never forget, US intelligence created or endorsed some of the most brazen lies of the twentieth century, starting with Kennedy's "missile gap" thrown in Eisenhower's face.

From the US Congress, indeed from the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, Florida Republican Porter Goss, a former CIA officer, have come indignant charges that US intelligence estimates were willfully perverted. Similar charges have been rightly leveled in the UK.

At the same moment US headlines were assigning collapse in popular esteem for Bush at 50 per cent approval or below, in the UK on September 27, the Financial Times announced on its front page, "Blow for Blair as 50% want him to go"

But red herrings abound. After all, the big question, both sides of the Atlantic, is how the two governments concocted their lies about the need to go to war against Iraq, and how these lies were ladled out to the press and thence to the citizenry. (The active connivance of important sectors of the press, is of course another vital part of the story.)

Yet the British press has been in full cry on a marginal issue: what were the precise circumstances in which Kelly's name was leaked? Michael Heseltine, a former Conservative Defense Minister, then deputy prime minister, was one of the few who made the point, in a piece in

The Guardian on September 1:

"I vividly remember listening to the news of David Kelly's death. I also remember the coincidental announcement of a judicial inquiry and my reaction to it. ... Dr Kelly's death gave a new urgency to the demand for an inquiry but it also provided a lifeline. The government could concede the case for an inquiry, but one with narrow terms of reference that precluded any investigation of the major matters now of growing concern. Lord Hutton was appointed. The terms of reference were tightly drawn. The risks were thus controlled. The media loved it. ... To those who inhabit or observe the hothouse of politics this was meat and drink of high protein, but compared to the historic implications of what was happening in the Middle East it was short-term trivia."

Precisely the same diversion is offered in the US, with the pointless hubbub about whether someone in the White House leaked the name of Joe Wilson's wife, a CIA officer. Aside from anything else, we don't understand why leaking her professional identity was supposed to discredit her husband, who had exposed the faked deal between Iraq and Niger for yellowcake. The Democrats are barking excitedly along this trail, which shows how nervous they are of confronting any real issues to do with the war.

But those, like us here at CounterPunch, who said at the time of the publication of the British government's dossier, and after Secretary of State Colin Powell's briefing to the UN Security Council on the threat posed by Iraq, that they were manifestly deceptive, can permit ourselves a wry smile at the belated

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Pederson. Whatever else she elicited from the quiet inspector, Sgt Pederson successfully implanted in him a yearning to know more about her own membership of the Bahai sect.

In 1999 he visited Monterey, though he did not contact two other former UN inspectors who lived there. Guiding him was Mai Pederson, who described her role to other Bahais in Monterey as being Kelly's "spiritual advisor". By the fall of 1999 Kelly had become a Bahai, and sometime after that Mai Pederson visited Kelly in England and met his wife, who has made somewhat muted statements about her. Pederson testified at the coroner's enquiry into Kelly's death but refused to let that testimony be transmitted to Lord Hutton. After surfacing in the Hutton enquiry and the press, she's vanished from the Kelly saga, and it is fair to assume that the US exerted great pressure to get her name out of the Kelly saga.

Like other religious groups, the Bahais had a definite interest in the overthrow of their oppressor, Saddam, though orthodox Islam has not smiled on Bahais either.

So, did Kelly have an affair with Pederson and was that affair a factor in his death? Why exactly did he kill himself, assuming that he wasn't murdered? Was it anguish at being exposed by the

British government as someone who had lunch with a BBC journalist. It seems unlikely. Maybe he was hoping to run away with the attractive Ms Pederson and when she said this was longer in the cards, decided that life and Mrs Kelly's reproaches weren't worth facing. Maybe he was told by his employers that they were aware of his relationship with Mai Pederson, and that unless he testified to the Select Committee at the BBC's expense, the precise nature of this relationship would be leaked. It's the sort of thing Intelligence Services do, and it's the sort of blackmail that can push some people over the edge.

## HARRODS: "CORRUPTION HERE IS RIFE!" OR IS IT?

This is my first time in London since my sister Sarah died a few years ago. More than ever, Indians seem to be running all the significant portals of daily life: the news agents, the cell phone stores, even the fish and spice departments in Harrods. There were Indian police constables at an antiwar demonstration in Trafalgar Square.

Unlike many of the Indians running motels and small businesses across the States, they're a friendly lot. "If he gets promoted, it will be a sure sign that corruption here is rife!" I heard a Indian voice shout indignantly as I descended into the spice section in a basement of Harrods. The voice belonged to an attractive woman at a cash register, addressing her remarks to a small Dickensian-looking white man who was nodding hearty agreement.

I asked whether the offensive promotion was inevitable and, laughing, she said that No, as yet we had to suspend judgment on the moral condition of Harrods' management.

I don't think I've been in Harrods' food halls for thirty years or more and was only there that day because a local branch of Barclays Bank, next to Harrods, had voided its pledge to open at 9am and was putting off the evil hour till 10. I could see through the plate glass window a manager giving a handful of employees an inspirational talk.

Because of Al Qaeda it's no longer a simple matter to open a bank account, something I needed in order to open a cellphone agreement. You have to produce utility bills to your name at an address you have inhabited for 3 months. No doubt an Al Qaeda operative could easily forge such documents, but I tried to go the honest

route, and was sent to Barclays International to open some sort of transnational account. A nice Irish lad, patiently helping an African student to fill in some complicated form, took time off to tell me such an account requires a minimum balance of 2000 pounds at all times and "isn't for you". He discounted the Al Qaeda theory and said it was because England was full of rogues and credit card fraud. Probably true. Next day the Indian girls at the phone store told me I'd have to buy the 220-pound Nokia phone for cash. Not even a debit card would do.

Having a bouillabaisse in view, I bought a couple of red mullet, a wrasse, plus some shellfish from the man at the fish counter. All the Harrods cash registers offer a dollar conversion, and as a woman at the fruit counter proudly stated, the store doesn't even charge a commission on any exchange deal. In my memory Harrods food halls had been temples of gastronomic extravagance, with the sort of displays favored by early nineteenth century impresarios. But now, to an eye used to the displays at the Arcata Coop or even the Safeways across California, the vegetable counters looked wan.

I walked north across Hyde Park. There were plenty of dogs, off-leash, taking the fresh morning air. Well-bred terriers predominated, with far fewer of the large and hairy breeds one sees in American city parks. There were less perspiring joggers too and fewer gays, though that may simply have been because of the earliness of the hour. At least in that part of the park there was a lack of the kind of shrubbery favored by the antinomian classes, though there are some useful-looking bushes behind Peter Pan's statue.

My pay-as-you-go cellphone rang and it was JoAnn Wypijewski telling me that Edward Said had died. I spent the next hour writing a farewell, which immediately went up on our CounterPunch website. Normally we don't favor cross-overs between the newsletter and the site, but exceptions exist to prove (in the sense of test) the rule.

## EDWARD SAID, DEAD AT 67

A mighty and a passionate heart has ceased to beat.

Edward Said, the greatest Arab of his generation, died in a New York City hospital Wednesday, September 24 at 6.30 pm,

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Published twice monthly except  
August, 22 issues a year:  
\$40 individuals,  
\$100 institutions/supporters  
\$30 student/low-income

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