

Britain: Was whistleblower Kelly's death suicide?

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25 July 2003

The body of Dr. David Kelly was found on July 18. His left wrist had been slashed.

At the end of May, Kelly, a leading Ministry of Defence microbiologist and former senior UN weapons inspector in Iraq, had told BBC reporter Andrew Gilligan and other journalists of his concerns over the misuse of intelligence material concerning Iraqi weapons of mass destruction by the Labour government of Prime Minister Tony Blair. Kelly became the focus of a government and media campaign to expose his identity. He was named and then forced to testify at two parliamentary inquiries into whether the government had lied in its intelligence dossiers of September 2002 and February this year.

Kelly testified in public to the Foreign Affairs Committee on July 15 and in private to the Intelligence and Security Committee on July 16. He disappeared from his home and died on July 17.

The police, the government and the media have all proceeded on the assumption that Kelly committed suicide by slitting his wrist due to the enormous pressure he was under. On July 19, Thames Valley police declared that he had bled to death after he slit one wrist. Superintendent David Purnell said a knife and an open package of Coproxamol tablets, a paracetamol-based painkiller, had been found at the scene.

Such a rush to judgement, even before a coroner's inquiry has concluded, is impermissible given the high profile role Kelly was playing and the political embarrassment he was causing to the government, the Ministry of Defence and others.

The case for Kelly having committed suicide is plausible, but one does not have to declare categorically that he was murdered to understand that events must be seriously investigated before a verdict on his death is

given. Before doing so, a number of important inconsistencies in the accounts of events that have been made public must be examined and explained:

Kelly is said to have walked out of his home at 3:00 p.m. It was not until he had failed to return by 11:45 p.m., that his family phoned the police.

It was only then that the police launched a search for Kelly, involving helicopters, sniffer dogs and more than 70 officers.

It was only at 8:20 a.m. the next day that the police went public, appealing for sightings and issuing a photograph of Kelly. When his body was discovered at 9:20 a.m., his identity was still not confirmed for several hours, although the media was already reporting the body as Kelly's and there would have been no difficulty in recognising such a high profile person.

His wife, Janice, was only asked to confirm his identity to a coroners officer on Saturday July 19.

These events are peculiar for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the slowness of official reactions throughout the two-day period.

Apparently, Kelly was initially placed in a safe house before being allowed to return home, yet there were apparently no police guards or MI5-MI6 spies outside his house to observe the movements of someone accused of being a major security threat and possibly breaking the Official Secrets Act.

There must also be a serious investigation of Kelly's behaviour on the morning of July 17 before he left his farmhouse home in the south Oxfordshire village of Southmoor, walked for over an hour across sodden fields, and then supposedly cut his left wrist and bled to death.

Dr. Kelly's wife, Janice, told the *New York Times* that her husband had worked on a report he said he owed the Foreign Office and sent some emails to friends.

None of these emails gave an indication of a man about to commit suicide.

In one sent to *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller he spoke of “many dark actors playing games” with him, and went on to state that he was waiting “until the end of the week” before judging how his appearance before the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee had gone.

Another email to an associate was described as “combative,” stating that he was determined to overcome the scandal surrounding him and was enthusiastic about the possibility of returning to Iraq as a weapons inspector.

No suicide note was apparently left by Kelly, a man ready to talk to the press on numerous occasions and who left his wife and children with no explanation of his decision.

It is, of course, arguable that Kelly’s behaviour could not be expected to be consistent, given the highly charged character of his emotional state. But such an explanation must be confirmed through a serious examination of the facts rather than assumed a priori.

Regarding his biography and psychology, four years ago Kelly converted to the Baha’i religion, a pacifist faith that strongly condemns suicide. A spokesman told the *Guardian*, “Baha’is believe that the soul of the individual comes ever closer to God in the life after death. Those who take their own lives risk damaging their soul in the life hereafter.” His friends, such as journalist Tom Mangold, have portrayed him as someone who was far from being a pushover who could not cope with pressure, having functioned under the stressful and dangerous conditions faced by weapons inspectors in Iraq.

Special Branch officers from Scotland Yard have sealed off Kelly’s offices in Whitehall as “part of a wide-ranging investigation into why the Ministry of Defence scientist died,” the *Times* has reported. “A team of Special Branch detectives moved into Kelly’s office in the MoD’s headquarters late on Friday, securing it from any outside interference.”

What “outside interference” are they concerned about?

An inquest into Kelly’s death was opened on July 21 and adjourned five minutes later until an unspecified date. Oxfordshire Coroner Nicholas Gardiner said the 59-year-old died from an “incised wound” to the left

wrist. His statement on the discovery of Kelly’s body was terse. “The circumstances were that he was reported missing on July 17 and on Friday July 18 he was found dead at Harrowdown Hill,” he said.

“I think on Saturday his wife confirmed the ID to a coroner’s officer. It had been confirmed circumstantially anyway.”

Gardiner said he would have to wait for results from toxicology tests before releasing the body for burial. These results have still not been made public.



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