

Dr David Kelly Was on a Hitlist, Says UN Weapons Expert as Calls Grow for Full Inquest

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A leading UN weapons inspector last night added his voice to the growing clamour for a full inquest into the death of Dr David Kelly.

Dr Richard Spertzel claimed Dr Kelly was on a 'hitlist' in the final years of his life.

The former head of the UN Biological Section, who worked closely with Dr Kelly in Iraq in the 1990s, has written to Attorney General Dominic Grieve about the 'mysterious circumstances' surrounding the death.

The weapons inspector's body was found after he was unmasked as the source of a damaging BBC news report questioning the grounds for the Iraq war.

Officially, he took his own life.

Yesterday Dr Spertzel told the Mail that the British authorities were 'intentionally ignoring' the issue.

He believes that there is something 'fishy' and insisted that a coroner should examine the death as soon as possible.

His demands come 24 hours after nine of Britain's leading medical experts wrote an open letter to ministers demanding a full inquest.

Dr Spertzel said: 'I know that David, as well as myself and a couple of others, were on an Iraqi hitlist. In late 1997, we were told by the Russian embassy in Baghdad. I had no idea what it meant but apparently David and I were high on the priority list.'

He said he and Dr Kelly were told that they were 'numbers three and four' on the list during an inspection trip in Iraq.

'When it first happened I felt right away that David just being associated with the work he'd been doing for the UK government would have made him a high target,' Dr Spertzel said.

The Iraqi intelligence service did not take kindly to such action so my first reaction [to Dr Kelly's death] was "we'd better watch our backs".'

No inquest has ever been held into Dr Kelly's death. Instead, a public inquiry chaired by Lord Hutton was set up to investigate the circumstances surrounding it.

The inquiry ruled that the 59-year-old committed suicide in woodland near his Oxfordshire home in July 2003 by cutting the ulnar artery in his wrist with a blunt pruning knife.

Dr Spertzel, who is based in Washington where he continues to write and lecture on biological weapons, said: 'My concern about David Kelly's death is exactly what the doctors are saying now - that is, it's virtually impossible to commit suicide by slashing your wrist in that way.'

'It just doesn't make sense. It seems to me that they [the British authorities] are intentionally ignoring all this. Something's fishy.'

Yesterday some of the doctors who wrote to ministers demanded an end to the shroud of secrecy over the death.

They want the official post-mortem results to be made public and for witnesses to give evidence under oath.

Concern over the cause of death has been mounting after it emerged in January that all medical and scientific records, including the post-mortem report and photographs of the body, were secretly classified for 70 years in 2004.

Sir Barry Jackson, past president of the British Academy of Forensic Science and one of the doctors who wrote to ministers, said yesterday: 'In my experience from 30 years as a practising surgeon I find it difficult to agree with the cause of death as listed on his death certificate.'

Another, Dr Elizabeth Driver, a solicitor and Fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists, added: 'As a pathologist I cannot understand how Dr Kelly could have died from blood loss of a severed ulnar artery. It makes no medical sense. Little is known about the medical facts because the post-mortem has been kept secret.'

'There are obvious questions which were not addressed in the inquiry.'

Doubts over the official version of his death have previously been raised by Mai Pederson, a U.S. Air Force linguist who served in Iraq with Dr Kelly's weapons inspection team.

She said he had a painful elbow injury which meant his hand was too weak to cut a steak.

He would have to have been a 'contortionist' to have killed himself in the way the Hutton Inquiry claimed, she said.

She also said he had a disorder that made it difficult to swallow pills, undermining Lord Hutton's claims that he took some himself.

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