

Political Assassination: Dr. David Kelly 'Couldn't Have Slit his Wrist as He Was Too Weak'

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Dramatic new testimony has heaped pressure on ministers to reopen the investigation into the death of Dr David Kelly.

A female colleague claims that the UN weapons inspector could not have committed suicide as claimed, as he was too weak to cut his own wrist.

Mai Pedersen, a U.S. Air Force officer who served with Dr Kelly's inspection team in Iraq, said a hand and arm injury meant that the 59-year-old even 'had difficulty cutting his own steak'.

Dr Kelly was found dead in woods near his home in 2003 after the Government exposed him as the source of a BBC report questioning Tony Blair's government's case for war in Iraq.

In a letter to the new Attorney General Dominic Grieve through her lawyers, Miss Pedersen also said Dr Kelly had difficulty swallowing pills, casting serious doubt on the Hutton Inquiry conclusion that he swallowed 29 painkillers before slitting his left wrist.

Campaigners hope her extraordinary intervention will convince ministers of the need for a new investigation. Mr Grieve has already indicated that he believes the case could merit a further inquiry.

Had she testified at the Hutton Inquiry, Miss Pedersen would have revealed that in the months leading up to his death Dr Kelly was unable to use his right hand for basic tasks requiring any strength such as slicing food because of a painful elbow injury.

Miss Pedersen says he would therefore have had to be a 'contortionist' to have killed himself by slashing his left wrist, as Lord Hutton concluded in 2004.

She called for a 'formal, independent, and complete' review of the case at the earliest opportunity, saying it was the only way to achieve 'closure'.

The letter said the absence of a full coroner's inquest into Dr Kelly's death and 'perpetual secrecy' meant it was 'crying out' for further scrutiny.

Dr Kelly, who worked for both the UN and later the Ministry of Defence, was found dead seven years ago next month in an Oxfordshire wood.

He was said to be deeply upset after being exposed as the source of a controversial BBC news report questioning Britain's grounds for going to war in Iraq.

The report, by journalist Andrew Gilligan, stated that Tony Blair's press spokesman Alastair Campbell had 'sexed up' the case for war for political reasons.

But, unusually for a death of this nature, no full coroner's inquest has ever been held. Instead, Tony Blair appointed retired judge Lord Hutton to chair a non-statutory

Witnesses, who included Dr Kelly's widow, Janice, and Tony Blair, were not questioned under oath.

Lord Hutton concluded that Dr Kelly died by haemorrhage after slashing his left wrist but, as the Mail reported last week, his death certificate was officially registered before the Hutton Inquiry ended and it was not properly completed.

It was not signed by a doctor or coroner and does not state a place of death, as all death certificates should if this information can be established. This leaves open the possibility that he died somewhere other than where his body was found.

To further deepen the mystery, all evidence relating to the post-mortem has been classified for an incredible 70 years.

Miss Pedersen's view is significant because she knew Dr Kelly so well, both personally and professionally.

The pair worked together in Iraq in the 1990s and remained close friends until his death, although Miss Pedersen, 50, has always said that she and Dr Kelly were not romantically involved.

She was initially asked to give evidence to the Hutton Inquiry in 2003 and agreed to do so, but was not called. This was because, it is claimed, the inquiry would not allow her to testify in private.

Her letter to Mr Grieve, dated June 10, states: 'We understand you have indicated a willingness to consider possibly reopening the investigation into the continuing controversy into the death of Dr Kelly.

'Given the absence of any coroner's inquest and the perpetual secrecy surrounding the post-mortem examination, it is painfully obvious that this matter continues to cry out for a formal, independent and complete review. Ms Pedersen fully supports and adds her voice to such an effort.

'The passage of time [does] not diminish either the public's interest or the government's responsibility to ascertain the full truth, whatever that might be.'

The Hutton Report failed to allay suspicions of foul play in Dr Kelly's death. On the morning of July 17, Dr Kelly mysteriously told a friend by email that there were 'many dark actors playing games'.

In 2007 it was discovered, through a Freedom of Information request, that the pruning knife he is said to have used to cut his wrist had no fingerprints on it.

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