Clarity emerges as court closes its doors: What has been learned on 10 key points as inquiry's first phase ends

Saturday September 6, 2003

The Guardian

The doors of Court 73 closed on Thursday after four weeks in which the inner workings of the British government were laid bare as seldom before. Lord Hutton will return to the Royal Courts of Justice a week on Monday. In the first phase of the inquiry a wealth of emails, memos, letters, minutes and personal testimony have revealed several important truths about the government's handling of the case for war and its impact on one man, David Kelly:

1 The many faces of Dr Kelly
The portrait emerging is of a complex, self-contained individual, a man enthusiastic about his work but uncommunicative in private life who found it difficult to share his personal worries.

An intimate description of the man was given by his widow Janice, daughter Rachel, and by friends and colleagues.

His religious beliefs—the Baha'i faith—and his scientific background committed him to telling the truth. But inconsistencies have been thrown up. He told the Commons foreign affairs committee he had not spoken to the BBC reporter, Gavin Hewitt, and he failed to acknowledge a phone conversation with another BBC reporter, Susan Watts.

2 Dr Kelly apparently killed himself having come under growing pressure in the glare of public attention
The evidence from his widow, his daughter and Keith Hawton, director of the centre for suicide research at Oxford University, created a vivid picture of a man under growing pressure.

Mr Hawton concluded that he almost certainly did commit suicide and that, though the causes of suicide are multi-faceted, he had not made the decision until the day of his death.

One factor was the continuing emails and calls from the Ministry of Defence that may have led him to realise that his evidence to committees of MPs did not mark the end of the affair but instead meant he was being drawn further in.

Mr Hawton said Dr Kelly had suffered "severe loss of self-esteem" as a result of being described by the MoD as a low-ranking civil servant, and felt a sense of "dismay at being exposed to the media".

3 Downing Street took very seriously the BBC's allegation it had inserted the 45 minute claim into the Iraq dossier knowing it to be wrong
Lord Hutton has heard that for Tony Blair the allegations could not have been more serious: "You already have this extraordinarily serious allegation which, if it were true, would mean we had behaved in the most disgraceful way and I would have to resign as prime minister," Mr Blair told the inquiry.

It amounted to lying to parliament, and Mr Blair said he viewed the BBC report as having accused him of having duped the public into the war.
The PM admitted the festering row had derailed his agenda: "Since then that has been the issue. I mean we are three months on and it is still the issue."

4 No. 10 was keen to see Dr Kelly's name become public partly to forward its case against the BBC

Alarm bells rang in Downing Street and the MoD when Dr Kelly admitted speaking to the BBC's Andrew Gilligan. As soon as they suspected he was Gilligan's source, they wanted to use him in their battle with the BBC, in particular to say that Gilligan had embellished what the scientist had told him.

The MoD gave clues to journalists about his identity before confirming his name. Dr Kelly, a very private man, was told to give televised evidence to the Commons foreign affairs committee, an experience from which he never recovered, the inquiry heard. Lord Hutton has made clear that the outing of Dr Kelly, and the way the MoD treated him, will feature strongly in his report.

5 Tony Blair was intimately involved in the naming strategy of Dr Kelly

Mr Blair was told on July 3, by Jonathan Powell, his chief of staff, that a possible source for Gilligan's story had emerged.

The prime minister's weekend at Chequers was peppered with further discussion about the matter with his most senior officials, including Alastair Campbell. On Monday July 7 Mr Blair met officials in his study, and asked what was known of Dr Kelly's views and what would he say to MPs. A decision was made to have him reinterviewed.

On Tuesday the Kelly issue arose at three meetings involving the PM. The decision to issue a press release was approved and written by Mr Blair's spokesman and other top officials.

On July 9 the PM's official spokesman revealed a crucial detail about the identity of the supposed source which helped to lead reporters to Dr Kelly.

6 The Iraq dossier on weapons of mass destruction was over-egged

Compare a copy of the draft dossier on September 5 and the final publication on September 24 and there is no doubt that it was hardened up.

The draft, which had existed since February last year, was a typically dry Foreign Office/M16 document, with the emphasis on how Iraq had these weapons before 1998. The final document uses the same information but the emphasis has switched to such weapons presenting a current threat.

Brian Jones, a former analyst with the MoD's defence intelligence staff, claimed it had been over-egged. Mr Campbell denies sexing it up, but the changes he suggested did alter the presentation by portraying Iraq as a bigger threat than it appeared to be on September 5.

7 The claim in the dossier that Iraq could deploy its chemical weapons within 45 minutes of an order to do so came from a second-hand and dubious source

The claim was controversial before the inquiry, but now looks very tarnished. The government said it came from an Iraqi officer. Possibly, but this is not quite the whole truth. In fact it came second-hand through another source.

Staff in defence intelligence, according to one of its former top analysts, feared the motive of the source who reported the claim, worrying he might be trying to influence rather than inform. Even intelligence officials who
thought the dossier a good idea were worried about the 45 minute claim. Dr Kelly thought it "risible" that WMD could be deployed so soon, one witness said.

John Scarlett, the chairman of the joint intelligence committee, let slip the claim referred to battlefield munitions, and not missiles with a longer range. The dossier led to claims that Iraq could launch WMD within 45 minutes towards British bases in Cyprus.

8 There were rows within the intelligence community over the wording of the dossier
Intelligence officials, notably experts in the MoD, questioned many of Iraq weapons dossier's key assertions. Dr Kelly shared these concerns, but they were ignored by those drawing up the dossier under the overall supervision of Mr Scarlett, who developed a very close relationship with Mr Campbell.

Mr Scarlett insisted that he, and not Mr Campbell, retained "ownership" of the dossier until its contents were agreed. But the inquiry heard that the full JIC did not approve the dossier, which was drawn up by a special group including Mr Campbell. The full extent of concerns about the dossier were not aired in the inquiry since MI6 officers—who provided much of the raw intelligence—did not give evidence.

9 Geoff Hoon was less than fully truthful in his evidence to the inquiry
The defense secretary's evidence to the inquiry saw him try to deny any responsibility for how Dr Kelly, effectively his employee, was treated.

The last revelation of stage one of the inquiry was that he appeared to have been less than candid with Lord Hutton. Mr Hoon had been at a key meeting to approve the naming of Dr Kelly, his special adviser, Richard Taylor, revealed.

The defense secretary had failed to mention this in his evidence, during which he said he had not been involved in any talks about confirming Dr Kelly's name to the media. An admission from Mr Hoon that he knew about the decision to confirm the scientist's name had to be dragged out of him by the inquiry counsel James Dingemans QC.

10 Andrew Gilligan's story that No 10 wanted to "sex up" the Iraq dossier has largely been vindicated, but his claim that Downing Street inserted the 45 minute claim knowing it to be wrong has not been substantiated
The claim by the BBC journalist, based on a meeting with Dr Kelly, that No 10 wanted to "sex up" the dossier has been largely supported by evidence.

The inquiry has heard that defense intelligence officials believed the dossier was "over-egged" after pressure from outside, taken to mean No 10. But there is no evidence to back Gilligan's initial claim that the government knew the 45 minute claim was wrong.

The inquiry also heard that Gilligan wrote an email to David Chidgey, a Liberal Democrat member of the Commons foreign affairs committee, outing Dr Kelly as the source of a Newsnight story by his BBC colleague Susan Watts.

Gilligan was also accused at the inquiry of playing a "name game" with Dr Kelly, trying to get the scientist to identify Mr Campbell as responsible for "sexing up" the dossier.