

Chair of UK Iraq War Inquiry: Tony Blair went “beyond the facts” to justify invasion

By Paul Mitchell
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Sir John Chilcot, chair of the inquiry into the role of the British government in the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, stated Wednesday that former Labour Party Prime Minister Tony Blair went “beyond the facts” in order to justify the war. Referring to the notorious speech the unindicted war criminal Blair made to Parliament on the eve of war, Chilcot said that “the evidence to support it was more qualified than he gave expression to.”

Chilcot’s appearance before Parliament’s Liaison Committee provides further devastating confirmation of the illegal character of the war and the criminal role of those who organized and led it. This applies not only to Blair, who operated in Britain as chief propagandist for the invasion, but also the principal architects of the war in the United States: former President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and others, as well as all those who supported it, including the Democratic Party’s presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

Chilcot’s report was published in July, seven years after the inquiry was first convened. It covered the policy decisions made by the British government, military and intelligence services between 2001 and 2009. Although the inquiry had no legal powers and was instructed not to question the legality of the invasion, it provided overwhelming proof that those responsible for the war should face war crimes charges.

The Chilcot report stated that the legal case for UK military action was “far from satisfactory.” The invasion that began on March 20, 2003 took place before “peaceful options for disarmament” had been exhausted, it recorded, adding, “Military action at that time was not a last resort.”

Despite repeated attempts by members of the Conservative Party-dominated Liaison Committee who,

for their own political purposes, tried to press Chilcot to state that Blair had lied to MPs and the population about the threat posed by Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, he refused.

Instead, using the most diplomatic language possible, Chilcot asserted, “I think when a government or the leader of a government presents a case with all the powers of advocacy that he or she can command, and in doing so goes beyond what the facts of the case and the basic analysis of that can support.” Chilcot added that he “can only imagine” how long it would take to repair voters’ trust in politicians, as a result of the pack of lies utilized to justify the illegal war.

Chilcot’s attempts to avoid the blindingly obvious, however, became increasingly threadbare, contradictory and desperate as he answered questions from Conservative committee chair, Julian Lewis, who cynically complained that in 2003 he was one of the MPs who “spoke and voted in favour of removing Saddam Hussein, but who now believes it was entirely the wrong decision.”

Lewis: For what primarily do you blame Tony Blair about the way in which he took the country to war and from what do you absolve him?

Chilcot: I absolve him of a personal and demonstrable decision to deceive Parliament or the public... to say falsehoods knowing them to be false... However, he also exercised his very considerable powers of advocacy and persuasion rather than laying the real issues fairly and squarely...

Lewis: Who should have stood up to him?

Chilcot: Cabinet ministers were given promises by him in Cabinet that they would have the opportunity to consider, reflect and decide on a number of big decisions... He did not give them the opportunity and they did not insist on it being given to them.

Lewis: You seem to be willing to acquit Mr. Blair of lying about his belief in Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs).

Chilcot: It was exaggeration, placing more weight on the intelligence than it could possibly bear is a conclusion we reached.

Lewis: A briefing note from Blair sent in January 2003 to Bush said ‘the biggest risk we face is internecine fighting between rival groups after military intervention’. Why did he ignore that terrible possibility that he himself said?

Chilcot: I cannot give you the answer as to why. You would have to ask him. But what is clear is that this risk was clearly identified before the invasion. What was foreseeable and advised did indeed happen and arguably could and should have been avoided.

Chilcot explained that the Hussein regime posed “no imminent threat” to Britain, and reports from the Iraq Survey Group showed that biological and chemical weapons had been destroyed after the 1990-1991 Gulf War. It would have been “quite extraordinary if something was discovered on any scale at all”, Chilcot said. He emphasised that there had been “no hidden arsenal” and that Hussein could not have supplied WMDs to terrorist organisations or acquired nuclear weapons “within months”.

Ignoring this and the need for a United Nations Security Council resolution, which he knew was necessary, Chilcot continued, Blair shifted British policy from “containment to coercive diplomacy” i.e., war. Chilcot said the Labour cabinet did not receive formal written advice from the Attorney General, the government’s most senior legal figure, about the legality of the war or discuss it.

Chilcot attempted to explain that the drive to war was the result of Blair’s forceful personality. He said former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw gave evidence to his inquiry claiming that the reason the Cabinet failed to challenge Blair was because he had won two general elections. “Tony Blair had, as leader of the opposition and in government, rescued his party from a dire predicament. I had the sense from Straw’s answer that he had achieved a personal and political dominance, a sheer psychological dominance.”

Chilcot further attempted to absolve Blair by saying the US would have gone ahead without Britain anyway.

This is an attempt to absolve the entire political

establishment of its collusion in what the majority of the population knew was a barefaced violation of international law. Nearly 100 percent of those MPs in parliament long enough to do so either voted for the war in 2003 or voted against convening Chilcot’s inquiry.

The real motive behind the war was not the threat of weapons of mass destruction or terrorism, but the pursuit of global domination by the US and the determination of Britain’s ruling elite to ensure their share of the spoils. Britain’s Parliament, led by the Labour government, voted for an illegal war of aggression because it agreed with Blair that supporting the US was a strategic imperative for Britain’s ruling elite. Within days of the invasion, Blair was boasting it was a chance to establish “the true post-Cold War world order.”

The Chilcot report has served its purpose for the ruling elite, who always intended it as the basis for finally washing their hands of Iraq and moving on. Following the publication of Chilcot’s report earlier this year, only around 50 MPs, out of 650, even showed up to debate it in Parliament. Their main concern was that, whatever the consequences of Iraq, it would be wrong to use the criticisms to oppose further interventions. Neither newly appointed Tory Prime Minister Theresa May, nor, more significantly, Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, participated.

Corbyn is playing a central role in ensuring that those within his own party who were responsible for the invasion and occupation of Iraq are not brought to justice. Despite deriving a substantial part of his support from promises to oppose further military adventures in Syria and Iraq, Corbyn has refused to call Blair a war criminal or propose expelling him from the party, knowing the majority of Labour’s warmongering MPs would oppose it.

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