

Elite Impunity and the Chilcot Report - Will Tony Blair Ever Go to Jail?

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What stands out in the British Iraq Inquiry (Chilcot) report is the sidestepping of the war crime issue. But then it was carefully placed outside its scope. This omission aside, the indictments remain, damning and morally appalling. Thus it confirms the war was launched on a false pretext. Major General Michael Laurie made plain in his testimony that Tony Blair's notorious "dossier" was designed to persuade Members of Parliament to vote for the war: "We knew at the time that the purpose of the dossier was precisely to make a case for war rather than setting out the available evidence." In this, he echoes CIA Director George Tenet's notorious "slam dunk case."

So it was, a war based on hyped up intelligence instead of objective assessment; a fact clearly not overlooked by the inquiry when it concluded in its damning assessment (judgment?), that the invasion was not a "last resort" because peaceful options had not been exhausted.

If, in the judgment of the inquiry, the war was not a "last resort", then it contravenes Article 33 (Chapter VI: Pacific Settlement of Disputes) of the UN Charter which states the parties "shall, first of all, seek a solution by inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice." These actions were far from exhausted leading to the unstated (by the inquiry) conclusion that the belligerents were guilty of a war of aggression. It was the Nuremberg Tribunal that famously called such a war, " ... not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole."

The unbelievable mess that is now Iraq, epitomized by the horrific recent (July 3) bombing in Baghdad killing over 250 people, is directly attributable to the war — the perpetrator ISIS did not exist before it. Horrific as the numbers are, they are but a drop in the ocean of misery as this neocolonial venture has led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians and the displacement, internal and external, of at least ten million.

'If only I had known' or 'I stand by my decision based on the facts at hand at the time.' These protestations too have been knocked flat by the Chilcot report: "We do not agree that hindsight is required" for there were clear warnings of what has occurred. It was likely that the threat from al-Qaida, squashed and kept out of Iraq by Saddam Hussein, would increase — it has morphed into the ISIS colossus where the former regime's capabilities are now evident.

To the unjustified certainty of WMD, the stated casus belli, the report adds further: “Despite warnings, the consequences of the invasion were underestimated. The planning and preparations for Iraq after Saddam Hussein were wholly inadequate.” The war and, in particular, the bungled occupation have ignited sectarianism and terrorism across the region and beyond.

What more can be said after such damning indictments? The British who suffered 179 dead initiated this inquiry. Yet, the US system of democracy has managed to ignore the ultimate sacrifice of 4491 service members; it leads to the obvious question: Is a US president immune, or is any sitting president afraid of setting a precedent?

On the day the Chilcot report came out, Jeremy Corbyn, the present Labour Party leader, addressed the House of Commons: “On February 15, 2003 over 1.5 million people ... marched against the impending war in the biggest demonstration in British history.” At least in Britain, he went on, “... while the governing class got it so horrifically wrong — many of our people actually got it right.” Not so in the US, where public opinion was manipulated by a massive PR campaign and the likes of, “... we don’t want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.”

And so it is. Are we ever likely to see Blair, Bush or Cheney in the dock. Not even if hell freezes over as the saying goes. Even now Hillary Clinton is off the email hook, just the latest in a long history of sordid events; meanwhile, a woman has brought charges of rape, when she was only twelve years old, against Donald Trump, whose former wife accused him also of rape until a handsome settlement. Sexual assault upon a New York hotel maid resulted in charges against Dominique Strauss-Kahn, former IMF head and putative French presidential candidate. The maid eventually being paid off, the charges were dropped.

When the political elite can act with impunity, it becomes a corrosive salt eating away at the framework of democracy. It is an ill omen.

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