

The Final Judgement of Alleged War Criminal Tony Blair

The Long Awaited Publication of the Chilcot Inquiry

By [Middle East Monitor](#)

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With the Chilcot Inquiry due to publish its long-awaited report on 6 July, an early indication of what the findings might be have been aired by BBC Panorama's "Iraq the Final Judgement". In the hour-long programme, journalist Jane Corbin returned to the war-ravaged country with the grief stricken parents of British soldiers killed in Iraq and former army officers to try to make some sense of what now seems like a senseless and unnecessary conflict.

Millions of British people, including families who lost loved ones, want to know if they were told the truth about why the nation went to war in Iraq, why it cost countless lives and why the invasion left a country in chaos. Couples like Roger and Maureen Bacon, who accompanied the *Panorama* team to Basra where their son Matt was killed, are hoping to find some meaning for their terrible loss.

Corbyn, who reported from Basra at the height of the Iraq war, interviewed a number of high profile figures, including former UN chief weapons inspector Hans Blix. Prior to the invasion, Blix was sceptical of the intelligence provided by the British. He warned the then Prime Minister Tony Blair that hundreds of inspections before the war had failed to yield any substantial evidence of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). He shared his doubts about WMD with Blair who brushed them aside. According to Blix, "[The] British authorities would frequently say intelligence shows us this and intelligence shows us that, but simply saying 'intelligence shows' is not evidence."



Tony Blair

Blair's persistent finger-pointing at the intelligence committee and his refusal to take any personal responsibility for the invasion is questioned by the former UN inspector along with the intelligence officials themselves. As the documentary makes clear, a year before the war British intelligence agents told the government that their knowledge of WMD was "sporadic" and "patchy"; six months later, though, they helped Blair to compile the dossier that made the case for war against Iraq.

Did the prime minister gloss over intelligence weaknesses to make a false case for war, and did he misrepresent the facts? Hans Blix is retired now and no longer feels the need to be careful with his words: "What he said did not represent reality." When pushed to say if Blair

misrepresented the facts, he responded, “Yes.” Claire Short, a former secretary of state for international development in Blair’s government was also interviewed for the programme. “I think he [Tony Blair] had made up his mind to be with [George W] Bush,” she said.

“And we were massaged and deceived to get us there when it was a manipulation of us – that is us, the parliament, the cabinet, British public opinion, American public opinion — by people who were determined to take military action from the beginning.”

Blix and Short have little doubt about the main question addressed by Chilcot: why did Britain go to war and who was responsible for what happened? Other prominent figures like former British Ambassador to the US Sir Christopher Meyer told Corbin that Blair said to Bush, “Whatever you decide to do George, I’m with you.” Meyer, who was at Bush’s ranch when the two leaders met in private to discuss the invasion of Iraq, added that a secret deal had been made with Blair to remove Saddam Hussain. The following day, Blair joined Bush in his plan for regime change and to bypass the UN.

The invasion of Iraq is infamous not only because of the lies and misinformation in the lead up to the war but also for the violence it unleashed and the abject failure to plan for the aftermath. Blair, it seems, was cherry-picking the advice he was given from the intelligence community. His entire defence for the failed invasion is based on faulty intelligence but the former prime minister is less forthcoming in admitting that intelligence chiefs had also warned of the heightened risk of terrorism that would follow any military action to topple the Iraqi president.

The manner in which the invasion was carried out, in particular the bypassing of the UN and failure to unite a broad coalition for regime change, meant that plans were not made, because all the players that were supposed to be involved were not involved, claimed Clare Short.

Predictably, regime change led to sectarian war and terrorism. Following the surprise collapse of Saddam’s forces, the initial feeling of gratitude and optimism changed quickly as fear and alarm gripped communities in the ensuing power vacuum. Brigadier Graham Binns, the Commander of Britain’s 7th Armoured Brigade in 2003, described the false sense of security as Bush pronounced “mission accomplished” prematurely. Looting, fuelled by the break-up of law and order, spread across Iraq. State apparatuses collapsed and essential services like water supplies came to a grinding halt. With Britain tied to the US policy of regime change, its troops in Basra bore the brunt of Iraqi resentment and anger; overnight the British became occupiers, not liberators.

The seeds of sectarian conflict and the rise of Daesh were planted during the early phase when occupation forces disbanded the entire Ba’ath structure that had held the country together, including the police, the army and the civil service. They stripped the entire regime completely but did not replace it with anything. According to Emma Sky, who was a British civilian coordinator during the early phase of the invasion, “It ended with hospitals without doctors and schools without teachers.” Britain and the US didn’t just remove the top tier of the Iraqi regime; the whole lot went. “So without any security forces, people were fearful,” Sky recalled. “They started to form gangs, militias were able to flourish, insurgent groups started to rise up.”

Failing to plan for the aftermath of the invasion left a power vacuum that pushed the country into a civil war. Brigadier Binns, who led British troops into Basra, returned to the city after thirteen years for *Panorama*. "I don't think we had a coherent plan in the longer term," he told Corbin. "The coalition hadn't thought through how we were going to operate in the aftermath of the fighting. We were unprepared both physically and mentally."

Parents like Roger and Maureen Bacon who lost loved ones in the Iraq war are still struggling to make any sense of it. "I would like to think that he [their son] lost his life in a worthwhile cause but I can't do that," said Roger. "We were carried into it [this war] and I can't emphasise how much I feel this was entirely wrong — this was a complete deception."

It's unlikely that the Chilcot Inquiry will provide meaning to an enormous personal loss, but will it at least heal the political and social trauma caused by Tony Blair? To mend Iraq's wounds in any meaningful way there has to be a sense that justice has been seen to be done for what was a deception of enormous magnitude and consequence. The final judgement of Tony Blair has to be nigh.

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