

# The Scandal of the Disappearing Chilcot Report into the Disastrous and Illegal Iraq War

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*When the Iraq Inquiry was first convened in 2009, it was expected to publish its findings before the 2010 general election. Instead Sir John Chilcot and his team completed their hearings in February 2011. At various times since then we have heard that its report was written and ready for publication.*

In January 2014, the British press was reporting that the 1,000,000+word report was ready for publication later that year.

Earlier this year there were rumours that the report would be published before the election, and then in April BBC Newsnight suggested that it would be published after the election.

And now [we have been told](#) that the report is unlikely to be published until next year 'at least'.

Yet neither the government nor the main opposition has appeared particularly concerned by the delay, and the public has also remained generally indifferent to it. The lack of interest from the political establishment is only to be expected. Labour is unlikely to benefit politically from publication, and nor is the Tory government, which would have done exactly the same thing in Iraq, and whose rush to war in Libya and Syria showed no more concern with the historical 'lessons' that the Inquiry was intended to learn than its opponents.

Nevertheless the public ought to be concerned, because the delay says so much about the way this country is governed and the truncated and managed democracy that we inhabit.

The delay appears to be primarily due to two factors a) The reluctance of the civil service to allow the publication of key documents that the Inquiry needs to make its case, and b) the so-called 'Maxwellisation' process, which enables individuals criticized by the Inquiry to see its findings before they are made public so that it can refute them.

We can't know whether the 30-odd individuals in category b have brought any influence to bear on the civil service to prevent the publication of documents that might be used against them.

One of them is Tony Blair, whose spokesmen have denied any such charges. No one will be surprised by such denials, but whether they are true or not, the civil service should not be allowed to have the final say on which documents get published or not.

After all the Inquiry, for all its limited remit, was established in order to investigate one of

the most disastrous foreign policy decisions ever taken by a British government. And its inability or unwillingness to publish its findings speaks volumes about the ability of powerful governmental institutions and individuals to protect themselves from the scrutiny of the public that they are supposedly accountable to.

As is often the case in the UK, very little has been done to avoid this outcome. The Inquiry was not given powers to sub-poena the documents that it wanted to look at, and was obliged instead to haggle and negotiate with civil servants who have been able to invoke national security and reasons of state to justify non-publication. And the 'Maxwellization' process has clearly paved the way for endless prevarication that would have resulted in the collapse of the judicial process if it was applied to ordinary justice.

The Inquiry itself had no legal powers, yet in December last year the *Times* was reporting that the 'Maxwellized' individuals were bringing in lawyers in response to the criticisms made against them. Exactly why they can use the law to defend themselves in private while the Inquiry can't use it to get full access to the documents it needs – let alone subject them to the same kind of cross-examination that would have occurred during the hearings if a judge was involved – remains a mystery to me. But then again, not so much.

All this ought to be a national scandal, yet so far there has been no serious political pressure to change this situation.

On the contrary, the longer the delay, the more likely it is that the politicians who never really wanted an inquiry in the first place will be able to consign it to historical irrelevance, and the British public will have forgotten what the Inquiry was ever supposed to have achieved, and the individuals and institutions that contrived to manufacture the Iraq catastrophe will continue to build new careers with their reputations unscathed, and the British state will continue to function, just as it has always done, with its dirty linen locked away in a box labelled 'national security' which no one will be able to see until it no longer matters.

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