

UK public inquiry into Iraq war to withhold crucial documents

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Months ahead of its date of release, it is being made clear that the UK's Chilcot public inquiry into the Iraq war will be published without including crucial documentation.

The documents to be withheld include notes revealing the unconditional support for military action given to the United States by then British Labour Party prime minister Tony Blair, almost a year before the illegal March 2003 invasion began.

The Chilcot Inquiry was established by former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown, who succeeded Tony Blair in 2007. The inquiry, headed by Sir John Chilcot, took evidence, mostly in public, from November 2009 to February 2011. Those appearing before it included Blair, other leading figures within the 1997-2010 Labour government, former cabinet secretaries and the military high command.

The inquiry was originally supposed to have completed its written report by early summer 2011. This deadline was delayed, with a new date of completion set for autumn of last year. It is now expected to be published later this year after a process officially known as "Maxwellisation" is finalised. During this process, any figures set to face criticism are to be presented with a draft copy of the report, in order to give them time to be able to respond.

According to the *Guardian* of March 12, "Whitehall [UK government] sources" told the newspaper that the "inquiry report will be published without crucial evidence that would reveal what Tony Blair promised President George Bush in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq 10 years ago."

The withholding of such critical records confirms the sham nature of the inquiry. It was established by Brown as the latest in a number of inquiries into the war, such as the Hutton inquiry into the death of whistleblower Dr. David Kelly (see "Britain: Dr. David Kelly death

evidence suppressed for 70 years").

Chilcot's terms of reference are explicit in that no one, from Blair on down, can be subjected to any prosecutions or legal proceedings as a result of its findings. In his first proposal, Brown even authorised that the Chilcot inquiry could be held in private without any media reporting. A public inquiry was finally settled on, with the proviso that it would have the most limited of remits and concentrate only on establishing the "lessons that can be learned" from British involvement in the Iraq war.

The nature of the entire charade was confirmed when it was revealed that one of the members of the committee of inquiry was Sir Martin Gilbert, a noted supporter of the invasion of Iraq, who opined in 2004 that the war criminals Bush and Blair may one day "join the ranks of [former US president Franklin Delano] Roosevelt and [British wartime prime minister Winston] Churchill".

Critically, Chilcot was prohibited from disclosing matters considered "essential to our national security" or "likely" to "cause harm" to "defence interests or international relations."

The government retained the power of veto over what documents could be made public or even handed over to Chilcot. To this end, the inquiry's final report will also be vetted, allowing any government agency or department to remove any sections they wish.

Over the past two years, Chilcot has asked for the declassification of certain documents, including correspondence and notes of conversations between Blair and Bush. These, Chilcot argued, provided "important and often unique insights into Mr. Blair's thinking and the commitments he made to President Bush".

Sir Gus O'Donnell, the cabinet secretary ruled that these documents were to remain declassified, after consulting with Blair.

Referring to statements made by Blair in his memoirs, as well as statements made by Jonathan Powell, Blair's

then chief of staff, and Alastair Campbell, his former head of communications, Chilcot wrote a letter to O'Donnell in January 2011. He noted that publication of the memoirs, and the refusal to disclose Blair's notes, "leads to the position that individuals may disclose privileged information (without sanction) whilst a committee of privy counsellors established by a former prime minister to review the issues cannot."

While the notes remain declassified, Chilcot and the four-member committee of inquiry, as trusted members of the ruling elite's inner sanctum, have privately seen Blair's notes.

Responding to Chilcot, O'Donnell said that the release of the notes was not in the public interest. "We have attached particular importance to protecting the privacy of the channel between the prime minister and president," he said.

In 2012, O'Donnell was replaced by Sir Jeremy Heywood. The *Guardian* reveals, "Sir Jeremy Heywood...is believed to share O'Donnell's approach to the release of the documents. It may be decades before the notes are released."

Heywood too was close to Brown and Blair, having served as principal private secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer when Brown held that position in the Blair government. He was promoted to principal private secretary to Blair in 1999. Heywood was forced to leave that post after it was revealed in the Hutton Inquiry that he claimed not to have taken any minutes, a job he was required to do, in four meetings in the Prime Ministerial offices on the subject of Dr. David Kelly.

In 2007, when Brown became prime minister, Heywood, after a stint as managing director of the UK Investment Banking Division at Morgan Stanley, became Brown's head of domestic policy and strategy at the Cabinet Office.

In an article released a week before the *Guardian*'s, the *Independent* claimed that the Chilcot report would be "authoritative" and "will draw on unprecedented access to Blair-Bush emails." The same article cited an inquiry source who said, "After some previous problems, nothing is being withheld," before the source added, "However issues over declassification of some documents, and what evidence can be formally identified in the report, do remain."

The *Independent* did note, "Washington is understood to be 'proactive' in finding out what evidence the UK government intends to allow to be published by the Iraq Inquiry".

It adds, "Among the sensitive areas the US State Department want the report to avoid analysing in any detail are the origin and basis of comments by the Bush administration's former Treasury Secretary, Paul O'Neill, who said an attack on Iraq had been planned since Mr. Bush's inauguration.

"Although other material from the US has been seen by the Chilcot team, it is believed that few, if any, documents that have a US origin will be published in the final report."

More than a decade after the filthy imperialist onslaught against a defenceless people, and as Chilcot's whitewash is prepared for publication, more information has come to light about the extent of the support of the Blair regime for Bush's war plans against Iraq.

A March 10 article in the *Sunday Telegraph*, based on an interview with a senior Bush administration figure, claims that Blair gave the US president his unconditional support in backing any subsequent military action against Iraq. This undertaking was given to Bush at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, in early April 2002, nearly 12 months before the invasion. Stephen Hadley, Bush's then deputy national security adviser, who was at Crawford, told the *Telegraph*, "Mr. Blair said that if it came to it, then at the end of the day, he would be with us if we had to move militarily against Saddam Hussein."

Hadley's account flatly contradicts a subsequent a UK Cabinet Office memo of the meeting, which stated that Blair would endorse military action "provided that certain conditions were met"—including building an international coalition, pursuing the Middle East peace process and exhausting options through the United Nations.



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