

The New York Times on the Chilcot report on Iraq war: “Nothing new here”

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8 July 2016

The US media has treated Wednesday’s release of the report by the Chilcot inquiry into the role of the British government in the 2003 US-led war against Iraq with nowhere near the attention that this historic document deserves.

Despite the limitations placed upon the inquiry, which was instructed not to judge the legality of the war, the report stands as a stinging indictment of not just Tony Blair and his aides in Britain, but even more centrally the government of George W. Bush for what stands as the greatest crime of the 21st century.

The *Wall Street Journal*, which remains to this day an enthusiastic proponent of the war, editorialized Thursday that “the so-called Chilcot Inquiry tells us nothing we didn’t know” and constitutes an exercise in “self-flogellation” by the British establishment.

Undoubtedly the most cynical response, however, has come from the editorial board of the *New York Times*. In a column titled “The Big News About What We Already Knew,” Andrew Rosenthal, who until last month was the newspaper’s editorial page editor, lumped the Chilcot report together with the House Select Committee on Benghazi’s findings and the FBI’s conclusions regarding Hillary Clinton’s emails as “three reports on matters of great import that offer precious little new or useful information.”

All that the Chilcot report establishes, according to Rosenthal, is that the Iraq war was a “damaging blunder,” and that Blair, in having “blindly followed Bush’s lead,” engaged in “an act of colossal bad judgment” that “is shocking for a politician of his stature and experience.”

He adds, “But we knew that.”

Really, that is all that the Chilcot report, spanning 12 volumes and 2.6 million words has to say? One can safely surmise from the unmitigated hypocrisy, arrogance and laziness of his column, Rosenthal has little to no idea what the document actually contains.

Is he even aware that it includes an entire volume on the intensely controversial—and in human terms the most significant—subject of Iraqi casualties resulting from the war?

The material deals at length with a story that the *Times* itself systematically suppressed: the 2006 study published in the prestigious British medical journal *Lancet* concluding that the war cost the lives of at least 665,000 Iraqis in less than its first three years.

The inquiry reveals that this study, which established the near genocidal criminality of the US-British aggression, was the subject of intense discussion within the Blair cabinet.

It establishes that, while Blair and his top aides were desperate to discredit the *Lancet* findings, the British Ministry of Defense’s own chief scientific adviser, Professor Sir Roy Anderson, concluded that “the study design is robust and employs methods that are regarded as close to ‘best practice’ in this area,” and that “the UK Government should be cautious in publicly criticising the *Lancet* study.”

Asked by then-Foreign Secretary Jack Straw in March 2007 to reevaluate the study, Anderson reiterated his conclusions, declaring, “... at this stage I see no value in either criticising the study or engaging in the public debate.”

The inquiry concluded that the desperation to discredit the casualty estimate was “driven by the Government’s concern to sustain domestic support for operations in Iraq,” no doubt the same motivation behind the failure of the *Times* to give any significant attention to the study at the time.

Nor, apparently, has Rosenthal bothered to review the previously classified memos sent by Blair to Bush (those going the other way remained censored at Washington’s request).

Not only do they include the July 28, 2002 message in

which Blair vowed to the US president, “I will be with you, whatever,” a declaration of indifference toward both the war’s illegality and the British public’s mass opposition to it. They also established that the war was seen not as a response to non-existent “weapons of mass destruction” and terrorism, but rather a means to establish “the true post-Cold War world order.”

In other words, they establish that from well before its outset, the war against Iraq was an act of premeditated aggression. Those who plotted and executed this war stand exposed as war criminals, guilty of the same offense for which the Nazi defendants at Nuremberg were ultimately hanged. They are responsible for atrocities that are infinitely greater than those attributed to any defendant who has been dragged before the International Criminal Tribunal at the Hague.

The Chilcot report, moreover, establishes an irrefutable case for Iraq and its people to demand untold billions of dollars in reparations for what amounted to the rape of their country.

All this is rendered as ancient history, meriting only a barely stifled yawn from Rosenthal. One might point out to the *Times* that more seven decades after the end of the Third Reich, people are still being charged for the crimes committed by the Nazis.

One cannot understand this staggering degree of cynicism and sheer indifference to the loss of human life outside of the fact that the *New York Times* as an institution played a major role in advocating and facilitating the Iraq war. Rosenthal’s column amounts to an accomplice at the scene of a crime shooing away bystanders with the words, “Move along, nothing to see here.”

During the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, the *Times* provided invaluable assistance to the Bush administration in dragging the American people into a war based upon lies. Its senior correspondent Judith Miller worked intimately with administration officials and right-wing think tanks to promote and embellish upon the phony “intelligence” produced on non-existent Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction.” Thomas Friedman, the paper’s chief foreign affairs columnist, churned out unending bully-boy columns advocating what he brazenly acknowledged would be a “war of choice” against Iraq, justifying it in the name of democracy, human rights and oil.

As the reputed newspaper “of record,” the *Times* set the tone for the rest of the corporate media, which together worked to overcome popular opposition to a new war in the Middle East with a concerted campaign of jingoistic

propaganda.

None of the them have ever been held accountable. Friedman, easily the richest newspaper columnist in the world, continues to produce ignorant drivel on the *Times* editorial pages, promoting US imperialist interests around the globe.

Another thing that escapes Rosenthal’s notice in his contempt for the Chilcot report is that no similar inquiry has ever been held in the US, which bears the principal responsibility for the criminal war in Iraq.

The *Times*, together with the entire US ruling establishment, is opposed to any such investigation for fear that it would undermine American militarism and an entire social order based upon financial parasitism and the aggressive plunder of the world’s resources.

This consensus was summed up by President Barack Obama in April 2009, soon after he was swept into office on a wave of popular hostility to the Iraq war, with the insistence that “Nothing will be gained by spending our time and energy laying blame for the past... we must resist the forces that divide us, and instead come together on behalf of our common future.”

On this basis, Obama came together with the war criminals who produced the slaughter in Iraq to continue and expand their policy. A decade and a half after they began, the US interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq continue. US-orchestrated wars for regime change have claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands more in Libya and Syria, while producing millions more refugees. And preparations for military confrontations with Russia and China leading to a Third World War are well advanced.

If Rosenthal is cynical and indifferent toward the Chilcot report, it is for good reason. He and other multi-millionaire pundits with close ties to the government and the financial aristocracy have a direct interest in American militarism, which serves as a material foundation for their wealth and privilege.

For working people in Britain, the US and internationally, however, the crimes and lies exposed in this report, whatever its limitations, will provoke renewed outrage and the demand that those responsible, including their media accomplices, be held accountable.



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