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Britain

Chilcot report vindicates anti-war movement

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The Chilcot report into Britain's war in Iraq has given a devastating verdict on the British establishment and Tony Blair in particular. It concludes the war was not necessary because all peaceful options had not been exhausted and there was no imminent threat from Saddam Hussein. Furthermore Chilcot severely criticises Blair and his government for failing to plan for the aftermath of the war. Chilcot may not accuse Blair of lying, but that is the only conclusion that can be read into the report.

Two previous reports into the war by Butler and Hutton had exonerated Blair and the establishment. It was only through the persistence of the Stop the War Coalition and Military Families Against the War that the 7-year long Chilcot enquiry was established. Its report comes close to revealing the whole truth and is sending the establishment reeling. As a result, the US and Britain are blaming each other for the disaster that has engulfed Iraq and the Middle East as a result of the war.

The Chilcot report vindicates what the anti-war movement had been arguing since 2001. The two million who marched behind the Stop the War Coalition in London on 15 February 200, and the millions of others who demonstrated in 600 cities around the world, knew then that Blair was lying and that there was no justification for the war. All the opinion polls at the time showed massive opposition.

Blair and his government showed contempt for democracy by turning their back on the majority of the people in Britain. In this, they were well supported by the establishment, the Tories and the media. There were some rare exceptions, such as Robin Cook who resigned as Leader of the House of Commons in March 2003, Hans Blix, the chief UN weapons inspector who confirmed that there were no weapons of mass destruction, and Eliza Manningham-Buller, the head of MI5, who warned that an invasion of Iraq would substantially increase the terrorist threat in Britain.

Despite mass opposition in the country to the war, 414 MPs voted for the war in Iraq on 18 March 2003, including most of the Labour and Tory benches. Today, there are 139 of these MPs still serving in Parliament – 66 Labour and 69 Tory. Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Diane Abbot were amongst the 85 Labour MPs who defied Blair, but Angela Eagle – who is now challenging Corbyn – voted for the war.

The war in Iraq, which started in March 2003, has had much deeper and long-lasting consequences that any other since World War II. The military defeat of the USA in Vietnam in 1975 brought peace to that country. It also prevented the USA from engaging in any large-scale military interventions until 2001, when, with NATO backing, it invaded Afghanistan following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The attack in September 2001 on the Twin Towers was an opportunity seized by US imperialism, along with its faithful allies such as the UK, to launch the never-ending "war on terror". This was an attempt at providing ideological glue to coalesce support behind western imperialism, which had lost the whip of the Cold War to mobilise states against the threat from the USSR and China. Western imperialism now needed a new justification for military interventions to re-establish its military power alongside its economic power. US President George Bush declared in 2002 that North Korea, Iran and Iraq constituted an "axis of evil threatening the peace of the world". War was therefore necessary against evil and terror. Therefore Military intervention was essential for regime change and to introduce democracy.

The war and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq have had tragic consequences: at least 174,000, and maybe up to 1

million, civilians dead, and 4,491 US and 179 UK military personnel killed. The war and occupation in Iraq cost Britain £10billion, on top of the £20billion spent in Afghanistan.

The tragic long term-consequences of the war come on top of the tragedy of the killing and the destruction that occurred during the war. Tony Blair continues to argue that the world and the Middle East would have been worse off if Saddam Hussein had not been removed. He told the BBC: "I don't believe that this struggle was in vain in the end".

Thirteen years after the end of the military operations, the balance sheet is here for all to see. The war in Iraq has spawned the development of the terrorist Al Qaeda and ISIS. The suicide bomb in Baghdad, on the day before the release of the Chilcot report, killed nearly 300 people. The regime change in Iraq has not brought democracy, but corruption, sectarianism and violence.

In the region, the picture is just as bleak. In Afghanistan, the Taliban is undefeated. The people of Syria are enduring five years of civil war from the twin barbarisms of ISIS and the brutal Assad dictatorship. There, maybe 500,000 have died, 5 million have fled the country as refugees and as many again internally displaced. There is still no just peace for the Palestinians as Israel continues its illegal occupation and the building of settlements. The dictatorships of the fundamentalist religious regimes in the Gulf States continue because they are faithful allies of imperialism. The Arab uprisings, which gave hope for democracy and social and economic justice, have stalled. This is most marked in Egypt where imperialism backs the new regime of el-Sisi, who led the military coup d'état against the elected President Morsi.

And in the "West", the war has also had negative consequences. Civil liberties have been curtailed in the name of the "War on Terror", including with the recent the Prevent strategy which seeks to curtail "extremism". The government has defined very loosely extremism in the Prevent strategy as: "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British Values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs." It is easy to see that this could include vocal and active, but not violent – opposition to the Royal Family or the House of Lords, or mass civil disobedience against unjust laws.

Immediately after 9/11, Bush defined the war on terror as a "clash of civilization". This justified Islamophobia and racism, as, in a sweeping generalization, Islam was associated with terrorism. Right wing and nationalist political forces, including in Britain, were able to declare that Islam was incompatible with western society. The racism unleashed following the Exit vote in the Referendum had the ground well prepared in the last 15 years.

Britain also collaborated with torture, rendition, and imprisonment without trial. Although, this was beyond the scope of the Chilcot enquiry, much has still to be revealed in Britain's co-operation at the notorious hellholes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantanamo Bay. But we do know, from Libyan opponents of Colonel Gadhafi, that they had been duped by Britain, who was secretly co-operating with the dictator to have then returned to the country for imprisonment and torture.

In the end, western imperialism would rather work with loyal but brutal dictators, rather than democratic but independent and popular states. Britain had co-operated for decades with Saddam Hussein until they lost faith in him. Diplomatic relations had been re-established with Libya following the 20-year long freeze, no doubt for lucrative oil contracts, despite Gadhafi being a brutal dictator.

It is just not credible for Blair to declare that he "acted in good faith" to make the world a better place. He acted to preserve the interests of British imperialism and its role as a strategic ally of the US, whatever the consequences. Indeed, he wrote to Bush: "I will be with you whatever". The political consequences are now unravelling for him and the establishment. He will never be able to shake off the label of liar and war criminal. He can expect to be pursued

wherever he goes. Legal action is a possibility such for misconduct in public office, damages or even impeachment in Parliament.

But the greatest of political consequences as a result of the war is the rejection of the traditional political establishment, in both the Tory and Labour parties, who have been pursuing a bi-partisan policy of support for imperialist wars and austerity for the people in Britain. The massive electoral victory of Jeremy Corbyn as a leader of the Labour Party is undoubtedly, in part, because his consistent opposition to the war in Iraq and his role in the anti-war movement. This included being chair of the Stop the War Coalition and a 50-year long membership of CND. The apology on behalf of the Labour Party for the Iraq war given by Corbyn in Parliament would not have happened had there been another leader. His heckling while giving the statement by Labour backbench MP Ian Austin shows that for many in Parliament, there is no remorse for the war.

There is certainly no remorse from the Tories who backed the war by voting with Tony Blair, with the exception of 16 of their MPs. Unlike Corbyn, Cameron – who voted for the war – has refused to either apologize, or even admit that the war was a "mistake" or "wrong".

The main political task for the left that arises out of the Chilcot report, apart from holding to account all MPs who voted for war and bringing Blair to justice, is to defend Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party. His opponents, not only have failed to actively oppose austerity, but they also want to bring back Labour to being a war-party, ready for imperialist interventions, and to support the Trident nuclear weapons system of mass destruction. To prevent a repetition of the tragedy of Iraq, we need an anti-war government in Britain.