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From [New York Times](#) | Original Article



London — WEDNESDAY [saw the publication](#) , years overdue, of the official report into [Britain](#) 's conduct of the 2003 Iraq war. The inquiry, led by a former senior civil servant, John Chilcot, reviewed thousands of documents and interviewed more than 100 witnesses, and the final report runs to more than two million words.

Its findings are clear. The British government, led by Prime Minister Tony Blair, exaggerated the case for war and decided on military action when it had not exhausted the alternatives. (As a former British diplomat and specialist on Iraq at the United Nations, I was one of those who testified to precisely this at the Chilcot inquiry.) The government also failed to prepare for the invasion and mismanaged the occupation of Iraq.

For many, this comes as confirmation of what they already believed. It is striking, nonetheless, to see it delivered in the cool, measured language of a retired government official. Those who said that Mr. Blair and his government were “misled” by faulty intelligence on weapons of mass destruction before the war have lost their claim: Mr. Chilcot’s report says Mr. Blair presented the intelligence case with a certainty the data did not justify. As for the occupation, the 13 years of chaos and violence that Iraqis have endured since the invasion demonstrate beyond question the incompetence and irresponsibility of those who planned and organized it.

British public inquiries like this have an ulterior purpose, which is to reassure the population that government can understand its mistakes and correct them. In Parliament, the prime minister, David Cameron, said gravely that the report would be studied and its recommendations followed. After a day or two of outrage, the news cycle will move on. But if such a debacle is not to occur again, a disaster of this magnitude requires deeper reflection and real consequences.

The Chilcot report does not in itself entail accountability. Criminal prosecutions appear unlikely, and outside of the courts, there is a poverty of options to hold the culpable to account. The day or two of public embarrassment that Mr. Blair and his collaborators now face is wholly insufficient — and what recourse could compensate for what has been inflicted both on the Iraqi people and on the soldiers who sacrificed their lives in this misbegotten venture? So many people [have died](#) in the conflict, at least a quarter-million since the invasion.

The ministers and officials who enabled Mr. Blair to perpetrate this catastrophe must also bear blame. Brave after the event, many testified before Mr. Chilcot that they knew the war was a mistake — yet they went along with it. But without them, it could not have happened. The “threat” of weapons of mass destruction was repeated by many diplomats and officials even when they, like me, were well aware that the scant intelligence we had could not substantiate the claim.

Some were dispatched to govern Iraq after the invasion, but with zero training or other preparation for the task. The war set off vicious sectarian violence — exactly as I had heard British officials warn explicitly on several occasions at British-American talks I attended before the invasion.

There are further, dire effects of the 2003 invasion the Chilcot report omits to mention. A thug named [Abu Musab al-Zarqawi](#), a marginal figure in Al Qaeda, was elevated in the jihadist hierarchy when Secretary of State Colin Powell, in his notorious prewar [speech to the United Nations Security Council](#), falsely named him as a terrorist ally of Saddam Hussein. As a result, Mr. Zarqawi gained status as America's declared enemy, an authority he exploited to become an extremist leader in the Sunni insurgency in Iraq.

Breaking with Al Qaeda, he founded the group that became the Islamic State, which today occupies Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, and a vast stretch of territory across Iraq and Syria, and just this week [killed more than 200 civilians](#) in suicide bombings in Baghdad. The Islamic State has inspired mass killings from California to Paris to Istanbul. In Syria, Islamic State fighters have already used chemical weapons. If the group obtains other weapons of mass destruction, it will use them.

Thus the invasion that was justified by an imaginary threat in Iraq helped create a crisis of global insecurity that will endure for a generation, at least.

Warmongering is a more subtle process than you might think. I saw, up close, how decent people collaborated in selling an unnecessary war. They believed that government must affirm its claim to provide security for the people by exercising the state's monopoly of force. As I once did, they shared a belief in government's knowledge and expertise: Government knows best.

Except when it doesn't. I've come to believe that governments' failed attempts to impose order by force are themselves the source of disorder. Many Iraqis would doubtless agree.

The Chilcot report reveals much about government and its failure but largely ignores the greatest issue. The enormous suffering and losses of the Iraqi people are scarcely mentioned; there is no attempt to count the dead.

There is also no recommendation of making reparation to the Iraqi people, let alone an apology. For me, this should be the ultimate significance of a report like this: that it speaks for those whose lives were needlessly wasted. It is their fate, not those of us and our politicians,

that should preoccupy us. Only then can we begin to grasp the magnitude of what was done in our name.