



Published on **18 September 2016** | issforum.org

A production of H-Diplo with the journals *Security Studies*, *International Security*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, and the [International Studies Association's Security Studies Section \(ISSS\)](#).

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A Note from the H-Diplo/ISSF Policy Roundtable Editors

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Regards,
Joshua Rovner, Frank Gavin, and Diane Labrosse

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Introduction by Seth Center, U.S. Department of State¹

When released in July 2016, *The Report of the Iraq Inquiry* elicited the familiar reactions to other government post-mortems about a controversial policy.² People noted its size and demanded to know what was new. When few ‘sensational’ details emerged, most observers concluded that the report confirmed what they already believed--good and bad.

At first cut, this roundtable follows the pattern. James Ellison observes that the Inquiry “did not unearth the kind of evidence that would change minds about the causes or conduct of the war. Instead, it affirmed what the British public already knew.” John Bew notes that this absence of sensational “revelations” will at least serve as an “antidote to some of the wilder conspiracy theories.” Robert Jervis suggests the purpose of such an official inquiry is to “lay out the historical record and reach sensible judgments, not to be original.” To be sure, some of those judgments are damning. Louise Kettle states that “a lightning blow has been stuck at the heart of the Cabinet machine.” The report reveals “deep structural and political failings, including how the power of personality in the office of Prime Minister can overcome checks and balances in place through Ministerial government.” The *Inquiry*’s bracing findings prompt Will Inboden to conclude that the report’s commitment to transparency and self-criticism exemplify a healthy democracy at work.

And yet, this roundtable’s analyses demonstrate that the *Inquiry* is more than a weighty affirmation of self-evident truths and the embodiment of high principle. The different vectors the contributors highlight--the perils of using intelligence in public discourse, the legality of war, the nature of alliance management in unequal relationships, the personal connections between U.S. President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the role of organizational structure and process in decision-making, to name a few--represent just a fraction of the theoretical, historiographical, and practical subjects requiring further reflection. Bew points out that the Inquiry offers a “searing indictment” of British conduct in the war itself, yet coverage of the actual military operations—which comprises half the Inquiry’s volumes--has not yet garnered a proportionate amount of scholarly attention.

The heart of the Inquiry’s work—the use of primary evidence, weighed against other materials, to reconstruct motivation, deliberation, and execution--is enormously significant. The heretofore preferred method of triangulating leaked documents, other government sanctioned reports, interviews, journalistic accounts, and memoirs hardly constituted scholarly bedrock. Without delving into the existing literature, we can readily acknowledge the deficiencies in evidence and the surplus of passion driving most of the writing over the past thirteen years. The *Inquiry* will represent the point of departure for future research.

The contributors demonstrate that despite its official veneer and the professionalism and integrity with which it was conducted, the Inquiry is still a work of history subject to the same analytical scrutiny as any other. It is not the final word. In his review, Joshua Rovner sees a discrepancy between the Inquiry’s reconstruction of intelligence lapses and its finding that intelligence assessments represented reasonable, if debatable, conclusions rather than proof of politicization. Calling this finding a “charitable judgment,” Rovner still

¹ The views expressed here are those of the author and not necessarily those of the U.S. Government.

² Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors, ‘The Report of the Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary’, 6 July 2016, http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/246416/the-report-of-the-iraq-inquiry_executive-summary.pdf

suspects politics at play. Once intelligence was used in the public domain to win a domestic debate, he argues that nuance and reassessment--hallmarks of good intelligence tradecraft--became impossible.

Jervis reminds us that hindsight--namely the "widespread agreement that the war was both unnecessary and a failure"--shaped the Inquiry's judgment whatever its protestations to the contrary. The *Inquiry's* critique of the UK government's exaggerated claims would look much different if the war had gone differently or Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) had been located. With the understated brilliance we are accustomed to, Jervis identifies a "fundamental question of how democracies are to conduct foreign policy," wondering where the "boundary exists between strong leadership and unacceptable political manipulation." He doubts the "comforting thought that only bad policies require unacceptable behaviors."

Inboden believes the Inquiry might have applied a different framework for evaluating Blair's influence on Bush. While the *Inquiry* carefully caveats the lessons from the experience, it does conclude critically that "Influence should not be set as an objective in itself," and suggests that Blair overestimated his ability to influence Bush.³ To Inboden, the *Inquiry's* transactional prism for assessing the U.S.-UK "special relationship" missed "how much Bush relied on Blair as a strategic partner in trying to understand and conceptualize what appeared to them both to be an unprecedented threat environment in the post-9/11 world."

Indeed, on the question of Blair standing "shoulder to shoulder" with Bush, the Inquiry's evidence could produce alternative conclusions. The Inquiry notes that Blair redirected U.S. strategy through the United Nations. If one asks, without the benefit of hindsight, whether the UN choice was consequential, the answer would have to be affirmative—it certainly was for the Bush administration officials who argued against it. The same could be said for Blair's insistence that President Bush support the Middle East Peace 'Road Map' as an adjunct to the Iraq campaign. Given that the United States possessed ample power to disregard both pieces of advice, and given the fierce desires of some members of the Bush administration to do just that, one might wonder whether Blair succeeded to a greater degree than the *Inquiry* suggests (just not as much as the British people would have hoped).

As a result of its breadth, the *Inquiry* produces some findings not wholly aligned with the context provided elsewhere in the report. Among its blunter judgements, the *Inquiry* concludes that as of March 2003, "the diplomatic options had not at that stage been exhausted. Military action was therefore not a last resort."⁴ Exhaustion seems an elusive strategic criterion in light of the interminable Security Council deliberations and differences over inspections laid out earlier in the *Inquiry*. An advocate for prolonging diplomacy would have had to have believed that extra time would yield a successful second resolution authorizing war or confirmation by inspectors that Iraq was fully disarmed, or would demonstrate that obstruction in the Security Council prevented a resolution, thereby proving diplomacy was indeed "exhausted." Scholars can debate these counterfactuals, but the evidence could explain that policymakers made a reasonable judgment in March that prolonging diplomacy would not clarify the situation.

³ *Inquiry*, 7: 631

⁴ *Inquiry*, Executive Summary: 6

Ultimately, the *Inquiry* concludes that the UK was not in a position to decide if diplomacy was manifestly exhausted anyway because the timing for war was driven “entirely” by the United States.⁵ The actual UK ‘choice’ was whether to decline participation in the invasion because Bush refused to further extend diplomacy. The *Inquiry* judges that the UK could have “sat it out” and still preserved the bilateral relationship. The conclusion is only relevant, however, if Blair is removed from the equation altogether. The *Inquiry*’s evidence shows that he believed in both the rightness of confronting Iraq’s leader Saddam Hussein and the bankruptcy of leaving the United States to act alone. He explained in January 2003:

“The price of British influence is not ... to do what the US asks. I would never commit British troops to a war I thought was wrong or unnecessary. Where we disagree ... we disagree. But the price of influence is that we do not leave the US to face tricky issues alone. By tricky, I mean the ones which people wish weren’t there, don’t want to deal with, and ... know the US should confront ... So if the US act alone, they are unilateralist.”⁶

It is difficult to avoid the impression that the *Inquiry*’s critique—however dispassionate—is shaped more by disappointment in Blair’s underlying strategic judgment that he must stand in the breach with Bush than the tactical missteps and procedural short-cuts so exhaustively documented. Blair’s beliefs frame the entirety of the British experience. “It’s worse than you think,” Blair told advisors on July 23, 2002, “I actually believe in doing this.”⁷ Understanding Blair’s inner dialogue will be as challenging as explaining President Lyndon Johnson’s decision-making in Vietnam.

The *Inquiry* is a brilliant foundational work, and a welcome invitation for scholars to debate whether it frames the right questions, weighs evidence correctly, and arrives at judicious conclusions. In formulating such assessments, scholars would be greatly aided by access to U.S. records. Ellison speculates as to why an equivalent U.S. inquiry was never undertaken. It would be preferable for scholars to direct their energy toward the more achievable goal of a comprehensive U.S. documentary record of the Iraq War. We should strive for something better than the current dribbling of declassified documents which produces distortions of the evidence and does not permit us to contextualize the policy-process. When sober-minded analysts like those in this roundtable have their crack at the documents, public discourse about the origins and conduct of the Iraq war will be enhanced and our understanding of contemporary challenges in the region will be advanced. When the documents emerge, officials will wonder why they did not support such an endeavor sooner, and public policy will be the beneficiary.

Participants:

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⁵ *Inquiry*, Executive Summary: 5.

⁶ *Inquiry*, 3.6: 82

⁷ Alastair Campbell, *The Blair Years: The Alastair Campbell Diaries* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2007): 630.

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Essay by John Bew, King's College London

At 2.6 million words, and seven years in the making, there is no question that the Chilcot Report is comprehensive, if not quite the final word on British involvement in the 2003 invasion of Iraq.¹ In one sense, it is an antidote to some of the wilder conspiracy theories surrounding the war and does little to support the suggestion that the government acted in an illegal manner. Nor is it full of new 'revelations'; most of the more controversial stories surrounding the war (such as the so-called 'dodgy' intelligence dossier) have long been in the public domain, or were aired during the public sessions of the Inquiry. Rather, Chilcot's importance is that it offers an overall political judgment on the war, based on a clear-headed synthesis of all the information available. That judgment is unambiguously critical in three respects. It raises questions about the decision-making process by which the British government decided to go to war (and confirms that the Blair government committed itself to an invasion at a very early stage in planning); it underlines the failure to make appropriate plans for stabilizing Iraq after the initial invasion (specifically rejecting Prime Minister Tony Blair's argument that the effects of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's removal could not have been known in advance); and, to an extent that has not yet been appreciated, offers a set of searing criticisms of the UK's military performance in Iraq after invasion. In addition to this, the report is particularly constructive on the deeply complex nature of alliance politics, from coalition building to coalition fighting.

It may be that Anglo-American relations in this era were more intimate than at any point since the Second World War. Yet it is worth pausing for a moment to consider how this relationship developed over the course of the lead-up to war, and its conduct – on which Chilcot's report provides some fascinating insights. On the one hand, the intimacy of the relationship between Blair and President George W. Bush underlay the whole venture. While they had taken different journeys to get to the point that they both hoped for regime change in Iraq, their worldviews were remarkably complementary. On the other hand, when one looks at the relationship beyond the two leaders, there were striking divergences – or at least different emphasis – on issues surrounding presentation, process, and procedure. Under the strain of events, some of these morphed into bigger issues that bedeviled planning for the war, and spilled into its conduct too.

The first thing that shines out of Blair's correspondence – as documented in the report – is that, on the fundamentals, he was fully committed to regime change in Iraq by the end of 2001. This had a direct knock-on effect on policy in Afghanistan, following the successful ousting of the Taliban government. One of the most interesting documents to emerge in the inquiry is a note from Blair to Bush as early as 4 December 2001 in which he urged the President to focus on reconstruction in Afghanistan. British officials were particularly concerned that the United States' focus on Iraq would leave the UK with overwhelming responsibility for security in Afghanistan. Yet Blair was also ambitious in his plans for the country as part of a desire to give interventionism a good name – partly because it would help make the case for the invasion of Iraq. He explained his logic to Bush: "How we finish in Afghanistan is important to Phase 2. If we leave it a better country, having supplied humanitarian aid and having given new hope to the people, we will not just have

¹ Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors, 'The Report of the Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary', 6 July 2016, http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/246416/the-report-of-the-iraq-inquiry_executive-summary.pdf

won militarily but morally; and the coalition will back us to do more elsewhere. In particular we shall have given regime change a good name, which will help us in the argument over Iraq.”²

Another theme to come out of the report is that, as war planning gained momentum in 2002, Blair felt that he was forced to operate within tighter parameters than his counterpart. This was partly due to growing opposition to the prospect of war domestically and internationally. It was also because of the British government’s desire to style itself as an international arbiter, reconciler, and the ‘bridge’ between the United States and Europe. Although this may not have been compatible with his firm commitment to going along with the United States in any case, it was a balancing act that he was anxious to maintain. In a minute of 17 March 2002, he wrote, “The persuasion job on this seems very tough. My own side are worried. Public opinion is fragile. International opinion—as I found at the EU—is pretty skeptical.”³ Two months later, in July 2002 memo, his concern that the “international community” was fragmenting on the issue came out even more strongly: “In Europe generally, people just don’t have the same sense of urgency post 9/11 as people in the US; they suspect—and are told by populist politicians—that it’s all to do with 43 settling the score with the enemy of 41 ...”⁴ The way in which the case for war was presented in the United States also caused difficulties in the UK. Bush’s infamous “Axis of Evil” speech – which named Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as the three principal rogue regimes – caused further difficulties for the British government. Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary, commented: “A lot of work will now need to be done to delink the three, and to show why military action against Iraq is so much more justified than against Iran and North Korea.”⁵

It is also fair to conclude that the difficulty of making the case for war had an adverse impact on the making of plans for it. Simply speaking, it meant that some things were prioritized instead of others. The lack of serious post-war planning was something that Blair identified early on. In minute to Jonathan Powell, his Chief of Staff, on 17 March 2002, Blair asked for more information on this before his summit with Bush in Texas: “In all my papers, I do not have a proper worked-out strategy on how we would do it. The US do not either, but before I go [to Crawford], I need to be able to provide them with a far more intelligent and detailed analysis of a game-plan. I will need a meeting on this with military folk.”⁶

Blair’s close relationship with Bush meant that he had significant political capital to spend. US Secretary of State Colin Powell reported to Bush on 28 March 2002, that Blair is “convinced on two points: the threat is real, and success against Saddam will yield more regional success ... Blair knows he may have to pay a political price for supporting us on Iraq, and wants to minimize it. Nonetheless, he will stick with us on the

² Blair to Bush, “The War Against Terrorism: The Second Phase,” 4 Dec 2001, quoted in Chilcot Report, 370, section 3.1, point 345.

³ Minute Blair to Powell, “Iraq,” 17 March 2002, quoted in Chilcot Report, 463, section 3.2, point 429.

⁴ Blair to Bush, “Note on Iraq,” 28 July 2002. See Chilcot Report, 72-75, section 3.3, points 415-434.

⁵ Minute Straw to Prime Minister, 25 March 2002, “Crawford/Iraq,” quoted in Chilcot Report, 471, section 3.2, point 471.

⁶ Minute Blair to Powell, “Iraq,” 17 March 2002, quoted in Chilcot Report, 463, section 3.2, point 429.

big issues. His voters will look for signs that Britain and America are truly equity partners in the special relationship.”⁷

Yet one of the things that Chilcot underlines out is that Blair chose to spend this capital on issues relating to the broader optics of the war, rather than specifics. First, as we have seen, was his emphasis on reconstruction in Afghanistan to improve the case for regime change in Iraq. Second was in his plea to Bush to make a renewed effort on the Middle East peace process. “You are a bridge not a poodle!” Powell told Blair on 28 March 2002, before his visit to Crawford, urging him to seek reassurances on Israel-Palestine. According to Powell, the issue must be raised to “demonstrate we do not have double standards by showing we are persuading the Americans to engage seriously on the MEPP.”⁸ As Blair put it in his diaries, “this was the indispensable soft-power component to give equilibrium to the hard power that was necessary if Saddam was to be removed.”⁹

Finally, and arguably most important, was Blair’s desire to preserve the cohesion of the ‘international community’ by his emphasis on the need to seek a second United Nations resolution. As Powell explained to the inquiry, we were “talking about how we could influence the Americans ... we were trying to replicate what we had done after 9/11 on Afghanistan. We were trying to say to them, ‘Don’t rush into anything. Move at a deliberative pace and, above all, build a coalition. Talk to people, go the UN route. Don’t rush into unilateral action.’ We believed unilateral action would have been a terrible thing by America, and we wanted to try and put it in a much wider political context.”¹⁰ One cannot accuse the British government of not having situational awareness, an appreciation of the importance of perception, or the balance between soft and hard power in international affairs. At one level, there was a degree of sophistication to such big-picture thinking and a desire to preserve the role that Blair believed he had carved out for the UK in the intervening years. But it is not clear that the focus on framing the war - or creating a better atmosphere around it - contributed to creating the conditions for success.

⁷ Memorandum Powell to Bush, 28 March 2002, “Your Meeting With the United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair, April 5-7 2002 at Crawford,” quoted in Chilcot Report, 487, section 3.2, point 552.

⁸ Minute Powell to Prime Minister, “Crawford’, 28 March 2002,” quoted in Chilcot Report, 479, section 3.2, point 514.

⁹ Tony Blair, *A Journey*, Hutchinson (2010), quoted in Chilcot Report, 523, section 3.2, point 732.

¹⁰ Public Hearing, 18 January 2010, pages 22-23, quoted in Chilcot Report, 480, section 3.2, point 517.

Essay by James Ellison, Queen Mary University of London

As the Chilcot report shows, the British were very much the junior partner in the Anglo-American alliance of the Blair-Bush era.¹ The chief responsibility for what happened in Iraq rests with the George W. Bush administration. Any of the accusations made by Sir John Chilcot about UK deficiencies over governance, legality, intelligence, and planning, let alone in understanding Iraq or the likely consequences of war, could be increased exponentially for the U.S. Why, then, has there been no equivalent to the Iraq Inquiry in the U.S., or calls for an American Chilcot?

To begin with, we must remember that Americans know a lot about what went on in the Bush administration. Many of its members published memoirs unusually quickly to explain or exonerate.² The press, media and filmmakers have also done much to describe events through fact and fiction. Moreover, serious histories have begun to be written by American commentators and academics. President Bush and U.S. federal agencies have also been held to account publicly, though lengthy investigations have focused more on the September 11, 2001 attacks and alleged torture against suspected terrorists. Postwar inquiries about Iraq focused on issues like the quality of intelligence rather than the quality of policy decisions.

There have, of course, been powerful U.S. voices against the Iraq war, but American political culture seems to have become acclimated to its controversy. It may be that the American people saw their nation's foreign policy in the Bush era, however ugly, as necessary. The war, after all, was not sought by Americans. It was brought to them on September 11. That event, without comparison in scale or significance, is perhaps the main reason why there has been no American Chilcot. The Americans wanted their supremacy restored, and the size of the crime carried out by al-Qaeda justified the means. They perceived a connection between Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, though no such connection existed, and gave the President wide latitude to pursue military action against both.

The Americans are also possibly less anxious about foreign policy controversy than their British or European allies. This is the nation of the Vietnam War and the Pentagon Papers, and of CIA involvement in assassinations, coups, and regime changes. As a superpower, it is inured to the inevitability and costs of foreign entanglements. That is not to say that the American people have been without anguish over Iraq. The 2006 midterms saw the Democrats secure a sweeping victory as the war in Iraq, along with other domestic issues, dogged the Bush administration and the Republicans. But it is to say that there is mission fatigue. Only that, and the fact that President Barack Obama is outgoing, explains why his announcement on the day that the Chilcot report was published did not cause a stir. After his departure in January 2017, he said, 8,400 US troops would remain in Afghanistan, not the planned 5,500.³ If the American people were concerned

¹ Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors, 'The Report of the Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary', 6 July 2016, http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/246416/the-report-of-the-iraq-inquiry_executive-summary.pdf

² See Melvyn P. Leffler, 'The Foreign Policies of the George W. Bush Administration: Memoirs, History, Legacy', *Diplomatic History* 37:2 (April 2013): 1-27.

³ Jim Garamone, "Obama: 8,400 U.S. Troops to Remain in Afghanistan through January," DoD News, U.S. Department of Defense, 6 July 2016, <http://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/827640/obama-8400-us-troops-to-remain-in-afghanistan-through-january-2017>

enough about this issue, U.S. politicians would have criticised Obama's statement and demanded an American post-mortem on the scale of Chilcot. They did not.

The enduring British interest in Iraq, and the initial fury in response to the Chilcot report's judgements, are remarkable by comparison. While the UK had its own al Qaeda attack on 7 July 2005, it was not of the scale of 9/11, literally or symbolically. It did not convince the British people – more used to terrorism on their shores than Americans – to think that the war on terror was justified. In fact, the possibility that Tony Blair had been warned that military action in Iraq could bring terror to Britain only enhanced a national mood of suspicion about his government's Iraq policy. That in part was due to a pervading, negative view of Blair's association with Bush and his administration; neither the President nor his supposedly neo-conservative-dominated government had popular support in the UK. Blair's style of government was also tarnished, especially after he left office. While Bush retreated from the public gaze, Blair sought it out. His continued profile, and his role as the Quartet's Special Envoy for peace in the Middle East,⁴ was thus fuel to the fire of his opponents' interest in seeing him brought to book over Iraq.

As the catastrophes of Iraq after 2003 added to doubts about the justification for war, British parliamentarians and commentators saw the early UK reports on Iraq as grounds for concern.⁵ There was a growing sense that the Blair government had departed from fundamentals in UK foreign policy. In particular, the idea that the UK intelligence agencies had failed, and that the British government had abandoned legality, legitimacy, multilateralism, and military prowess, turned up the heat.

That is why Blair's successor, Gordon Brown, agreed to establish the Iraq Inquiry in 2009. While public inquiries have become a tradition in UK politics, and while there have been investigations into earlier foreign policy dramas (the 1983 Franks Report on the Falklands war being most prominent), Chilcot's access to people and documentation was unprecedented. His inquiry's work dragged on six years longer than the initial estimate of one year as Iraq disintegrated and with it Blair's reputation. The anger at the inquiry's delay, and the anxiety that it might produce a whitewash, kept up the pressure in parliament and the press for Chilcot to report and for the publication to be a moment of clarification and catharsis. No previous public inquiry was as important as Chilcot's.⁶

Beyond the doubts about Blair and his government, the costs of the Iraq war, and the unprecedented analysis of Chilcot, the inquiry's importance lays in what Iraq has meant for the UK. Like many medium-sized European nations, the British have since the end of the Cold War been uncertain of their role in international affairs. This insecurity has been born from economic realities – the price of national-defence spending and international obligations – but it has also been about what interests and values Britain should pursue overseas,

⁴ The Middle East Quartet is comprised of the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and Russia.

⁵ See the report of the Lord Hutton's Inquiry, 2004, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221546/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/report/index.htm>, and the report of Lord Butler's Review, 2004, <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Politics/documents/2004/07/14/butler.pdf>

⁶ On the inquiry's importance, see my article "War guilt, Blair and the Chilcot Inquiry," 12 July 2016, <http://mei.qmul.ac.uk/news-and-opinion/blog/items/178984.html>

and how influence could be maintained in a changing world. Here the tensions between being the premier ally of the United States while also trying to be a member of the European Union, and between upholding multilateralism and the United Nations when the U.S. seemed disinterested in both, were painfully exposed over Iraq. So too were the limits of UK military influence and power. Although the American people face instability in international affairs, they are more certain than the British about their nation's strength and its role in the world. Hence, the Bush administration's Iraq war may have been questionable, but its attempt to re-establish American hegemony was not.

The same could not be said of the way the British people viewed their government's role in Iraq. That fact, fired up by the controversies surrounding Blair, produced an unusual eagerness in British society to understand a foreign policy issue and its consequences. Parliament and people had to feel satisfied that Chilcot had explained the events of 2001-2009, that the UK elites would reflect and act on the Chilcot report's conclusions, and that mistakes would not be made again. Given these expectations, it is somewhat surprising that the public debate has fallen silent since Chilcot. No doubt the Brexit vote and its aftermath are part of the explanation. So too are the Report's delay, the complexities of the issues that it covered, and the specialist nature of its recommendations. Also, for most, the Chilcot Report affirmed what they had suspected. The Blair government's decisions were not best made, the UK little influenced the U.S., and Iraq was a war of choice in which the price of victory was high and enduring.

Essay by William Inboden, University of Texas-Austin

When friends and colleagues ask me what I was most surprised to learn during my time working on the National Security Council staff for the Bush Administration from 2005-2007, one of the first things I usually highlight was the extraordinarily close relationship between President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair. Having worked at the State Department for the previous three years, I already had some firsthand exposure to the U.S.-UK relationship in the Bush-Blair era. But arriving at the White House revealed an entirely new dimension to the relationship. Besides their many summits and frequent written correspondence, the two leaders also held a weekly hour-long videoconference. Transcripts of these conversations were shared with a small number of NSC staff. The transcripts portrayed a relationship much deeper, more personal, and much wider-ranging than I had previously imagined. In the conversations Bush and Blair would move broadly across topics ranging from geopolitics to faith and family and the pressures of office. They would discuss everything from the tactical details of military operations in Anbar province to the relationship between political and economic reform in shaping China's future, and from the challenges of protecting their families from the cauldron of political pressure to the theological mystery of providence in human affairs. What also became clear to me was how virtually impossible it would be to quantify a matter like how much influence Blair had on Bush, or Bush had on Blair, on specific policy issues. There was rather a deep friendship between leaders who shared a common moral and political outlook, and who mutually influenced each other's thinking on various issues in myriad intangible ways.

Hence I read the Chilcot Report's account of the Blair-Bush relationship with interest, and particularly Sir John Chilcot's assessment in his public statement that "Mr Blair overestimated his ability to influence US decisions on Iraq."¹ On one level this may be true. As the report shows in great detail, Blair had earlier conditioned UK support for the invasion on securing a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution endorsing the use of force to remove Saddam Hussein from power, a position that Blair later backed away from when the second UNSC resolution failed to pass.² On another level, however, by trying to reduce the question of influence to how many specific policy decisions Blair persuaded Bush to adopt or not, the report misses the deeper dimension of the relationship, in particular elements such as how much Bush relied on Blair as a strategic partner in trying to understand and conceptualize what appeared to them both to be an unprecedented threat environment in the post-9/11 world.

Mindful of this context, the derisive commentary around the Chilcot Report's disclosure of Blair's note to Bush in July 2002 that "I will be with you, whatever"³ seems to miss the point. Rather than proving the hackneyed caricature of Blair as 'Bush's poodle,' read in context as a preface to Blair's reflections on the challenges and strategic choices surrounding a potential war with Iraq, the note seems better understood as an

¹ "Sir John Chilcot's public statement," 6 July 2016, <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/the-inquiry/sir-john-chilcots-public-statement/>

² Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors, 'The Report of the Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary', 6 July 2016, http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/246416/the-report-of-the-iraq-inquiry_executive-summary.pdf

³ The Chilcot Report, 72, Section 3.3; available at http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/246451/the-report-of-the-iraq-inquiry_section-33.pdf

affirmation of friendship and expression of solidarity rather than unconditional statement of fealty for the invasion.

Blair's complex relationship with Bush is in many ways a proxy for a deeper strategic issue pervading the Chilcot Report, and one which has in various ways beset every UK government since the Second World War: how does the junior partner in an alliance relationship use its leverage to maximize its effectiveness? Throughout the report are examples of UK policymakers trying to influence the U.S. while being mindful of their own lesser resources and geopolitical heft. More than almost any other nation, the British excel at self-flagellation, especially when it comes to lamenting their supposed lack of influence on their senior American alliance partners. In turn, in recent years one regularly hears calls from British strategists to downplay the 'Special Relationship' and expunge it of all vestiges of Churchillian romanticism. This passage from the Executive Summary is of such a type:

"Although there has historically been a very close relationship between the British and American peoples and a close identity of values between our democracies, it is an alliance founded not on emotion, but on a hard-headed appreciation of mutual benefit. The benefits do not by any means flow only in one direction."⁴

In setting up such a condescending dichotomy between "emotion," and "hard-headed appreciation of mutual benefit." the Chilcot Inquiry lapses into a desiccated understanding of the alliance and the many sinews that hold it together. The U.S.-UK Special Relationship (yes, some of us still call it that, and moreover still believe in it) is much more than just a formula of efficient burden-sharing calculated between strategists in Whitehall and Washington. It is a complex amalgam that includes shared interests, but also common values, cultural affinities, historical narratives, threat perceptions, and a strategic commitment to a liberal international order, broadly shared by the publics in both nations over the last 75 years.

For all of these shared affinities, allies of course do not always agree, even on matters of great strategic consequence. As the report notes, the UK has differed with the U.S. on significant and specific matters such as "Suez, the Vietnam War, the Falklands, Grenada, Bosnia, the Arab/Israel dispute and, at times, Northern Ireland,"⁵ and the alliance still survived. In this sense, the report argues, the Blair Government could have refused to join the U.S. in the Iraq invasion and not dealt a death knell to the alliance. More pointedly, it bears recalling that in the aftermath of the Iraq War and during the seven-year period of the report's composition, the U.S. and UK faced two additional vexing decisions on the potential use of force against Middle Eastern dictators accused of tyrannizing their own populations and pursuing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programs: Libya and Syria. In the former, in 2011 then-Prime Minister David Cameron famously teamed with French President Nicholas Sarkozy to persuade an evidently reluctant Obama Administration to launch an airstrike-led regime change operation against Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. In that case, at least, it seems that the junior alliance partners exercised considerable influence on the senior member. Two years later the roles were reversed as the Obama Administration asked for the UK's participation in coalition airstrikes against the Bashar Assad regime in Syria, to enforce Obama's infamous 'red line' against chemical weapons use. The House of Commons dealt Cameron a humiliating and historic

⁴ Executive Summary, 52-53.

⁵ Executive Summary, 53.

defeat, and very soon thereafter (influenced in part by the British vote) Obama reversed course and decided against military action. Once again, the UK had more influence on the U.S. than it perhaps appreciated.

A final thought on the alliance issue from the report: It is striking how much the British limitations and liabilities on Iraq mirror those of the United States. Among other joint failings, both nations failed in their intelligence assessments of Iraq's WMD programs, both nations failed in their assessments of the post-conflict environment, and both nations failed to plan and resource adequately their stabilization and reconstruction missions. While ideally allies complement each other and compensate for their partner nation's deficiencies, in this case the alliance reinforced and perhaps even exacerbated the individual failings of the United States and United Kingdom.

Let me conclude with this observation. Many commentators have rightly noted that the Chilcot Inquiry does not fundamentally alter our basic understanding of the Iraq War. In telling us little that is new, the report instead reifies the broad contours of what can be reliably concluded about the war, such as that the intelligence failures were tragic mistakes rather than deliberate deceptions, that Bush and Blair genuinely (even if mistakenly) perceived Saddam Hussein to be a threat and genuinely believed that the containment policy was crumbling, and that the massive failures of post-conflict planning and resourcing seriously exacerbated the costs and duration of the war.

In that sense, was the Chilcot Inquiry a massive waste of time and resources? I think not. Even though the report tells us little that is new, that does not mean it has little value. One distinction of a free society is the capacity for introspection, self-criticism, transparency, and correction. It is a tribute to the health of British democracy that this inquiry was undertaken, and done so with such professionalism and integrity. That it was released just a few weeks after a majority of British voters decided to exit the European Union, and in the midst of escalating tensions with Russia and the UK's ongoing participation in military operations against the Islamic State, further demonstrates the many strategic questions confronting the British body politic. Here it is to be hoped that Chilcot will lead not to a further round of backward-looking recriminations, but instead to forward-looking reflection how the UK will resolve the question of its role in the world.

Essay by Robert Jervis, Columbia University

The Mother of all Post-Mortems

The main news about the Chilcot Report¹ is that the picture it paints is a familiar one. It seems to me that at least in its coverage of the run-up to the war, it largely confirms what most scholars had come to believe.² But that should not be a cause for disappointment, because the point of inquiries like this is to lay out the historical record and reach sensible judgments, not to be original.

At several points the Report notes that its critical judgments are not based on hindsight, but in the fundamental sense the whole enterprise is and must be built on hindsight, having been triggered by the widespread agreement that the war was both unnecessary and a failure. Successes appear self-validating and rarely call for detailed, let alone critical, scrutiny. It is almost impossible to avoid judging processes partly by the outcomes. If it turned out that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had had active Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programs, for example, few people would have cared or even noticed that intelligence had expressed too much certainty, had failed to examine its assumptions, or exaggerated the reliability of its sources.

“In the Inquiry’s view the diplomatic options had not... been exhausted [when diplomacy was abandoned]. Military action was therefore not a last resort.”³ Although the American debate was framed in terms of whether this was a war of necessity or a war of choice, the essential question was the same. For the British, however, the question was more freighted because it was linked to whether Iraq was in ‘material breach’ of United Nations (UN) resolutions and therefore whether the war conformed to international law. This was central to the British debate at the time and subsequently, and it is covered in detail in the Report which in the end faults the process without reaching a definitive conclusion about the war’s legality or whether, as opponents have charged, the Attorney General’s conclusion to the contrary was a product of political pressures. The intricacies here are far beyond my competence, but the difference in trans-Atlantic perspectives is worth noting. In the U.S., even opponents of the war cared little about whether it was legal; my sense is that in Britain the claim that it was not was more than a mere additional reason produced by opponents, in fact it was a real motivation and that British Prime Minister Tony Blair could not have gone to war without a supporting legal certification. How the U.S. and Britain came to so sharply diverge in their orientations and whether this reflects only differences in material power are fascinating and important questions, but they are beyond the scope of the Report or this review.

For Britain, and especially for Blair, the felt the need to stand with the U.S. (“shoulder to shoulder,”⁴ in Blair’s words) was even more important, as the report makes clear. It also avers that that this was a questionable choice: “over the past seven decades, the UK and the US have adopted different and sometimes

¹ Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors, ‘The Report of the Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary’, 6 July 2016, http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/246416/the-report-of-the-iraq-inquiry_executive-summary.pdf

² Truth in commenting requires me to admit that I have not read every volume, let alone every word.

³ Chilcot Report, Executive Summary, 6, paragraph 20

⁴ Executive Summary, 5, point 12.

conflicting positions on major issues....[without] fundamentally call[ing] into question the practice of close co-operation, to mutual advantage, on the overall relationship, including defence and intelligence.”⁵ This statement is correct, and leads to important questions beyond the Report’s scope: what would have been the likely costs of breaking with the U.S.? Was Blair more enamored of the ‘special relationship’ than many of his colleagues and, if so, why?

But it would be a mistake to argue that the perceived need to be with the Americans was the only factor pushing Blair toward war. The report confirms previous judgments that he shared many of President George W. Bush’s views about the threat that Saddam posed and the multiple reasons to seek Saddam’s overthrow. Indeed, the roots of Blair’s support for humanitarian intervention were deeper than Bush’s. In the end, then, we cannot readily determinate how much Blair was pulled into following Bush’s lead as opposed to moving on his own parallel track.

The agreement at the top was not complete, however. Blair always wanted to move more slowly than Bush, in part because he had much more severe domestic constraints. His own views may have been a bit more conflicted as well. Although the Report concludes that “for the UK, regime change was a means to achieve disarmament, not an objective in its own right,”⁶ this may be a distinction without a difference because Blair and his senior advisors did not believe that the latter could be achieved without the former. Indeed, as far as I can tell, no thought was given to what relations with Iraq might look like if WMD programs were halted but Saddam remained in power. Some of the difficulty in determining Blair’s preferences is that they probably changed over time as he came around to believing that force had to be used, and this in turn derived in part from the fact that it became increasingly clear that Bush was committed to this course of action.

The Report documents that in the UK, as in the U.S., leaders consistently exaggerated the strength of the case for going to war and circumvented normal—or at least text-book—procedures. On top of the over-confidence of intelligence assessments, leaders dismissed the uncertainties that remained. They also pushed their intelligence agencies into making public reports (‘dossiers’ in British terminology), which in the end increased friction within the government and discredited intelligence in the eyes of the public. Most strikingly, in neither government was the decision to go to war aired at formal and fully-briefed meetings of the highest-level institutions. Although it is not news that the power of the Prime Minister has increased over the past half-century and the power of the Cabinet has correspondingly been diminished, the latter is still supposed to be key to the British system of government, and so the Report’s demonstration of the extent to which Blair sidelined it is significant. Judging by the response in the UK, this came as a greater surprise there than it did to me and my colleagues.

Whether surprising or not, these findings raise the fundamental question of how democracies are to conduct the foreign policy. Political leaders face extraordinarily difficult tasks in deciding what to do and assembling a supportive coalition. How much information should we expect them to share with likely opponents? Where are the boundaries between strong political leadership and unacceptable political manipulation? When a

⁵ Executive Summary, 53, paragraph 376)

⁶ Executive Summary, section 3.1, 386, paragraph 1080)

decision turns out to have been a bad one, we will highlight the latter elements, but I very much doubt the comforting thought that only bad policies require unacceptable behaviors.

The report documents that the Blair government exaggerated the danger that Saddam might give weapons to terrorists, although it was less egregious in this regard than was the Bush administration. But while internal documents show that neither expected such an alliance in the immediate future, both were worried about the long-term danger. If the 9/11 attacks did not ‘change everything’ in the UK as they did in the US, for the former as well as the latter it reduced the tolerance for risk and made more salient low-probability but high-impact events. Contrary to both the common generalization that heightened tensions lead people to focus on the immediate future, and the normative claim that we are better off looking to the future, leaders in both countries were moved by fears, not of what was likely to happen soon, but for the longer-run. Indeed, it was clear that invading Iraq would increase the immediate risks. They mislead the public not about the danger they saw, but when they believed it might eventuate. Presumably their underlying assumption is that while they, being stewards of their countries’ fates, were mature enough to give proper weight to the future, their publics were not.

Essay by Louise Kettle, University of Nottingham

The decision to take a nation to war is the most serious a politician can make. The newly released Iraq Inquiry report describes committing to military action as “a step of such magnitude” which, as the Chairman of the inquiry Sir John Chilcot noted in his publication statement, requires “the need to assess risks, weigh option and set an achievable and realistic strategy...the proper function of the Cabinet Committee system”.¹ However, the inquiry has provided a contemporary insight into the workings of British government and revealed that decision-making in the run-up to the Iraq War lacked judgment, challenge, and forward planning. In particular, Chilcot has shed light on the endemic failure of Cabinet government in the decision-making process throughout 2002-2003.

This failing emerged for three key reasons: First, Prime Minister Tony Blair has received significant criticism for his leadership style. Blair’s so-called ‘sofa government’ led to decisions being made ad hoc in consultation with a few close advisors, at the expense of maximising the expertise of the civil service, the advice of the Cabinet, and the debate found in the formal structures of Cabinet Committee. In this way he became the lone protagonist for Britain’s role in the Iraq War, by-passing colleagues and using Cabinet as a forum for summarising briefings and informing Ministers of decisions. In mid-2002, for example, Blair persuaded President George W Bush to use the UN to deliver an ultimatum to Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein of compliance with weapons inspectors or face military action. This decision, which tacitly committed the UK to military participation, was taken without Cabinet discussion or agreement. Similarly, in October 2002 Blair offered Bush British ground troops in support of any U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. The following year he agreed to assume post-invasion military leadership in southern Iraq. Both decisions were made without any Cabinet Committee analysis or formal Ministerial decision.

Second, there was a failure within Cabinet to challenge whether the war was necessary.² From the outset, the policy on Iraq was led by Blair’s alliance to the U.S. and shaped by ingrained beliefs within the intelligence agencies of Saddam’s Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) capabilities and intentions. The failure of the intelligence agencies to ‘red team’ whether Iraq had WMD has been well documented³ but there was equally little challenge of assessments within the Cabinet itself. Instead Ministers ‘endorsed’ intelligence, remained convinced of the existence of WMD and agreed that the absence of evidence of a WMD programme was the result of successful concealment. Furthermore, Ministers lacked imagination by failing to present alternative solutions to solve the WMD problem. The Chilcot report makes clear that peaceful options had not been exhausted and “there was no consideration of whether, faced with the prospect of a US-led invasion, Saddam

¹ Sir John Chilcot (2016) “The Report on the Iraq Inquiry”, Executive Summary, p. 134, and “Statement by Sir John Chilcot: 6 July 2016” both available at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/>

² The one notable exception here is the former Foreign Secretary and Leader of the House of Commons Robin Cook who resigned from government over the Iraq War. His resignation speech is available at Hansard (Commons), vol. 401, col. 726, 17 March 2003, available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmhansrd/vo030317/debtext/30317-33.htm>

³ This issue was also previously examined by Lord Butler (2004) “Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction”, available at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/>

Hussein had taken a different position.”⁴ In fact the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had reported to the UN Security Council on 7 March 2003 that there were increasing indications of Iraq’s cooperation with inspectors leading to the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) developing a new work programme.

Third, Cabinet members failed to request further information to facilitate informed debate and decision-making. In the past, civil servants have accused Blair of intentionally preventing key documents from reaching Ministers,⁵ but the Chilcot report also highlights how little documentation Cabinet requested or produced. Sir Roderic Lyne, a former diplomat and member of the Iraq Inquiry Committee, noted that when the Cabinet were asked to take collective responsibility for the war in March 2003 they had not had a single Cabinet paper on the subject in the previous year and a half.⁶ Sir John Chilcot utilises the issue of the war’s legality as an example: On 7 March 2003, Lord Goldsmith, the Attorney General, provided ambiguous advice over the legality of the war. Upon a request for further clarification from the armed forces and civil services (notably not the Cabinet) he concluded that if Iraq had failed to comply with UN resolution 1441 then the authorisation in resolution 678 (from 1990 to use “all necessary means”)⁷ could be revived as a lawful basis for intervention. Blair confirmed that Iraq had committed further material breaches of 1441 leading to Lord Goldsmith’s conclusion of legality. However, Blair’s stance was unilaterally concluded without consultation of the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee or a War Cabinet. Cabinet access to legal advice came through the provision of a copy of Lord Goldsmith’s Written Answer to Baroness Ramsay.⁸ Thus Ministers received the government’s legal position but did not request written advice on the conflicting legal arguments. In addition, this advice stated that “It is plain that Iraq has failed [sic] to comply and therefore Iraq was at the time of Resolution 1441 and continues to be in material breach”⁹ (based upon Blair’s information) but did not include any legal basis upon which this conclusion had been reached. No further documentation was requested. Similarly, Ministers were asked to make a commitment to war without ever having been provided with estimates of the military operation or post-conflict costs.

The criticisms from Chilcot are wide and plentiful, but a lightning blow has been stuck at the heart of the Cabinet machine. The report demonstrates deep structural and political failings, including how the power of personality in the office of Prime Minister can overcome checks and balances in place through Ministerial

⁴ Sir John Chilcot (2016) “The Report on the Iraq Inquiry”, Executive Summary, p. 117, available at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/>

⁵ Oliver Wright (2013) “Tony Blair kept Cabinet in the dark over Iraq 'deliberately' as ministers evaluated case for war in 2003”, *The Independent*, 13 November 2013, available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tony-blair-kept-cabinet-in-the-dark-over-iraq-deliberately-as-ministers-evaluated-case-for-war-in-8937814.html>

⁶ Sir Roderic Lyne to Lord Turnbull, 25 January 2011, available at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/>

⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 678, 29 November 1990

⁸ Hansard (Lords), vol. 646, col. WA2, 17 March 2003, available at http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200203/ldhansrd/vo030317/text/30317w01.htm#30317w01_spm11

⁹ Ibid.

government. An even bleaker picture emerges through a closer examination of the five declassified minutes of Cabinet meetings which took place between March 2002 and 2003. These disclose the cynical reality that whilst debate over whether to go to war was noticeably absent, debate over how to gain domestic and international support for the Iraq invasion was plentiful. It seemed that the most important decision a politician could make became, at least within Cabinet, not about *whether* to take a nation to war but about *how to persuade* a nation to take that step of such magnitude.

Essay by Joshua Rovner, Southern Methodist University

The Chilcot Inquiry's final report is a remarkably detailed examination of British decision-making before and after the war in Iraq.¹ It casts the net widely, covering intra-Cabinet deliberations, parliamentary politics, international law, alliance relations, and military strategy. Here I focus on the major controversy surrounding Iraq's suspected chemical, biological, and nuclear programs.

Intelligence on Iraqi capabilities was the centerpiece of the British government's case for war. In September 2002 it released a dossier, "Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction," based on the assessment of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC).² The document was unusual; never before had a British government released secret intelligence for the purpose of public relations during an ongoing policy debate. It was also important because it became the benchmark for intelligence in the months leading up to the war. Subsequent JIC assessments referred to the dossier and none substantially departed from its findings.

The dossier grossly exaggerated Iraqi capabilities, leaving the impression that Iraq presented an imminent security threat to Great Britain and its allies. Why did it get it wrong? Echoing previous inquiries, Chilcot blames the "ingrained belief" in the intelligence community that Iraq possessed chemical and biological capabilities, that it was determined to acquire nuclear weapons, and that it was committed to deceiving international observers of its real intentions.³ The dual assumption of Iraqi capabilities and Saddam Hussein's duplicity colored both intelligence and policy views long before the invasion in March 2003. Chilcot argues that intelligence services and policymakers were equally guilty of failing to challenge those core beliefs.

It also absolves policymakers from accusations of politicizing intelligence. "The JIC accepted ownership of the dossier and agreed its content," Chilcot concludes. "There is no evidence that intelligence was improperly included in the dossier or that No.10 improperly influenced the text."⁴ The report goes into great detail about the collaborative effort to draft and revise the dossier, finding nothing untoward about the process.

These conclusions are not entirely convincing. Chilcot is undoubtedly correct that intelligence analysts were suspicious of Iraq. I would not be surprised if most harbored the view that Saddam would have reconstituted his chemical and biological weapons programs if given the chance. But those same analysts were also quite candid about the limits of intelligence on Iraqi capabilities after the departure of international inspectors in 1998. For this reason, they routinely added caveats to their findings about the weakness of the underlying information.

¹ Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors, 'The Report of the Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary', 6 July 2016, http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/246416/the-report-of-the-iraq-inquiry_executive-summary.pdf

² "Iraq's Weapons Of Mass Destruction: The Assessment Of The British Government," 24 September 2012, BBC News Online, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/02/uk_dossier_on_iraq/html/full_dossier.stm

³ Executive Summary, 69.

⁴ Executive Summary, 73.

Chilcot notes that this changed by the fall of 2002. The report blames intelligence officials for being too sure in their findings and policymakers for being too ready to believe them. “Intelligence and assessments,” the report concludes, “were used to prepare material to be used to support Government statements in a way which conveyed certainty without acknowledging the limitations of the intelligence.”⁵ But this was not accidental. Indeed, Chilcot documents the steady drumbeat of pressure on intelligence to use more damning language and to remove indications of doubt and disagreement. Successive drafts included more detail about Iraqi capabilities, despite the fact that the intelligence analysts had not received new information justifying these changes. Indeed, almost immediately after the government indicated that it would go public with a document on Iraqi capabilities, revisions began adding startling new revelations about Iraq’s chemical and biological programs.⁶

The pattern continued through the summer,⁷ though in one case an analyst from the Defence Intelligence Service (DIS) convinced drafters to remove language about the possibility of Iraq building an improvised nuclear weapon. Not only was there no information in support of that conjecture, but the idea rested on a serious misunderstanding of the process of assembling a nuclear device.⁸ This case was the exception to the rule. Indeed, Chilcot notes that one of the biggest errors was the failure to consult DIS analysts in the weeks before the dossier was published in September. The failure to consult DIS experts allowed dubious conclusions to go forward.

While Chilcot does not blame the Blair government for leaning on intelligence, such lapses are characteristic of episodes of politicization. Policymakers who are eager for particular findings do not try hard to ensure that intelligence services follow best practices. Intelligence chiefs under pressure are also prone to using shortcuts, which increases the likelihood of flawed estimates.⁹

Policymakers did not hide their intentions in this case. They expressed their clear desire for language that would help them overcome domestic skepticism about a tougher position on Iraq. They also wanted drafters to remove indications of doubt and disagreement. Press officials understood that the appearance of consensus and certainty was essential, and they were dismayed to see caveats in the dossier. One official in the Foreign and Commonwealth News Department put the matter directly: “It is important that, where unnecessary and unhelpful, these expressions of the authors’ uncertainty are removed.”¹⁰ Senior intelligence officials went along with the program.

⁵ Executive Summary, 46

⁶ Volume 4, 82-83.

⁷ Volume 4, 130-131.

⁸ Volume 4, 176-177.

⁹ Joshua Rovner, *Fixing the Facts: National Security and the Politics of Intelligence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

¹⁰ Volume 4, 98.

The communal effort to bring intelligence into the public debate led to an unusually hardline interpretation of what Iraq possessed. Chilcot concludes that intelligence assessments were reasonable interpretations of the underlying information, pointing out that dissenters like Labour Party stalwart Robin Cook could disagree with the findings without believing that intelligence had been compromised.¹¹ This is a charitable judgment, given the wafer-thin evidence upon which the JIC based its findings. But even if we accept Chilcot's conclusion, it still cannot explain why intelligence findings grew more ominous in the summer of 2002.

The other major puzzle is why British intelligence never reconsidered its conclusions. The JIC continued to rely on the September dossier all the way up to the start of the war, despite the fact that inspectors found no evidence of active programs or stockpiles of biological or chemical agent. The inquiry notes that the government emphasized Iraq's habit of concealment and deception in the months before the war. By concluding that Iraq was untrustworthy while simultaneously demanding that Saddam demonstrate good faith, it created an impossible position for Iraq. It also meant that the inspectors' findings were basically irrelevant, a belief that probably discouraged uncomfortable question about why inspectors were coming up empty. Chilcot blames policymakers as well as intelligence chiefs. Their shared assumption about Iraqi duplicity led to analytical inertia at a time when reassessment was badly needed.

Robert Jervis offers a different explanation. The failure to review earlier conclusions may have occurred because analysts were resigned to reality of war. Jervis has argued that this process may have affected U.S. analysts in 2002-2003. Perhaps it also produced a kind of collective ennui in Great Britain. What was the use of going back over old claims, given the clear direction of policy?¹²

Both of these explanations are plausible, but I suspect politicization was at play. When policymakers enlist intelligence agencies to help win domestic political fights, they force intelligence to make bold public judgments on the basis of partial and sometimes dubious information. Having gone public, neither policymakers nor intelligence chiefs have any desire to review their findings, much less reverse them. Doing so would be deeply embarrassing.

The Chilcot report inadvertently suggests this argument. It notes that "after the invasion, the UK Government, including the intelligence community, was reluctant to admit, and to recognise publicly, the mounting evidence that there had been failings in the UK's pre-conflict collection, validation, analysis and presentation of intelligence on Iraq's WMD."¹³ If policymakers and intelligence officials were reluctant to admit their failures after the war, they were surely unwilling to reassess its conclusions while the domestic debate was still raging. Doing so would have thrown the government's rationale for war into doubt on the eve of the invasion. The claims about Iraqi concealment and deception were important in this context, because they offered a convenient reason to avoid such a review.

¹¹ Executive Summary, 46.

¹² Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

¹³ Executive Summary, 74.

These three arguments are not mutually exclusive. It is possible that flawed assumptions, dispirited analysts, and politicization combined to prevent the British intelligence community from updating its findings. But all three explanations stem from the decision to use intelligence to make the case for war. Going public required presenting information in stark terms and portraying Iraq as threatening and utterly incorrigible. Using intelligence to mobilize support overwhelmed the need for nuanced analyses and routine reassessment. The Chilcot Inquiry painstakingly reconstructs the role of intelligence in the public-relations effort in the year leading up to the war. Its findings are a reminder of the danger of using secret intelligence to win public political fights.