



Key findings of Chilcot Inquiry

The Chilcot Report into the circumstances under which the UK became a party to the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 was released on July 6. It was prepared by Sir John Chilcot, took seven years to complete and ran to 12 volumes. The following are just some of the key findings, and each is directly relevant to Australia:

1. The evidence of Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction was at best tenuous. The claims of several persons and incidents such as the alleged purchase of yellow cake from Niger were simply fabrications. Contrary evidence was either ignored or downplayed.
2. Policy decisions about the overthrow of Saddam Hussein had been made at least a year before the invasion, and drove the public narrative. Dearlove, the Head of MI6, stated that intelligence was being fixed around the policy.
3. Alternatives to military action were not allowed the time or emphasis they needed. These included diplomatic initiatives in the Security Council and the work of the UN weapons inspectors.
4. British PM Tony Blair kept from his cabinet and parliament the reservations of the Attorney-General and the entire Foreign Office legal staff as to the legality of the war in the absence of a further Security Council Resolution. The Attorney General was effectively pressured to modify his considered opinion on this, and produced, finally, a very brief answer to a parliamentary question that was contrary to his detailed opinion of only a few days previously.
5. There was an almost complete absence of any post-invasion plan for the effective administration of Iraq. Many decisions contributed to a chaotic situation that has reverberated to this day.

There are obvious parallels with the Australian experience. Confident statements were made by the government of the day about weapons of mass destruction, Iraq's belligerent intentions and non-compliance with Security Council resolutions and with UN weapons inspectors and much else that was simply unsupported by the evidence. The legal opinion tabled in the House of Representatives was of a very poor standard, and at odds with the overwhelming weight of international legal opinion.

To embark upon wars in such circumstances exposes its perpetrators to possible international sanction through a body such as the ICC, and its victims to a preventable humanitarian catastrophe. The lessons exposed by the Chilcot Report must be recognised and absorbed by Australia. That will only be possible with a similar inquiry here.