



Jeremy Corbyn's speech after the publication of the Chilcot Inquiry

Note this transcript may not be 100% accurate.

Before addressing the issues raised in the Iraq Inquiry report, I would like to remember and honour the 179 British servicemen and women killed and the thousands maimed and injured during the Iraq war, and their families as well as the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who have died as a result of the invasion and occupation of Iraq launched by the US and British governments 13 years ago.

Yesterday I had a private meeting with some of the families of the British dead as I have continued to do over the past dozen years. It is always a humbling experience to witness the resolve and resilience of these families and their unwavering commitment to seek truth and justice for those that they lost in Iraq. They have waited seven years for Sir John Chilcot's report. It was right that the inquiry heard evidence from such a wide range of people and that the origins, conduct and aftermath of the war should have been examined in such detail. But the extraordinary length of time it has taken to see the light of day is clearly a matter for regret. I should add that the scale of the report running to 6,275 pages to which I was only given access at 8 o'clock this morning means that today's response by all of us can only be a provisional one. Mr Speaker, the decision to invade and occupy Iraq in March 2003 was the most significant foreign policy decision taken by a British government in modern times. It divided this House and set the government of the day against a majority of the British people as well as against the weight of global opinion. The war was not in any way as Sir John Chilcot says a "last resort". Frankly, it was an act of military aggression launched on a false pretext as the inquiry accepts and has long been regarded as illegal by the overwhelming weight of international legal opinion. It led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and the displacement of millions of refugees. It devastated Iraq's infrastructure and society. The occupation fostered a lethal sectarianism – as the report indicates - that turned into a civil war. Instead of protecting security at home or abroad, the war fuelled and spread terrorism across the region. Sunday's suicide bomb attack in Baghdad which killed over 250 people, the deadliest so far, was carried out by a group whose origins lie in the aftermath of the invasion. By any measure, the invasion and occupation of Iraq has been for many a catastrophe.

Mr. Speaker, the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 on the basis of what the Chilcot report calls "flawed intelligence" about the weapons of mass destruction has had a far-reaching impact on us all. It's led to a fundamental breakdown in trust in politics and in our institutions of government.

The tragedy is that while the governing class got it so horrifically wrong - many of our people actually got it right. Many on February 15th, 2003 over 1.5 million people spanning the political spectrum, and tens of millions of other people across the world, marched against the impending war in the biggest ever demonstration in British history. It wasn't, Mr. Speaker, that those of us who opposed the war underestimated the brutality or crimes of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. Indeed,

many of us campaigned against the Iraqi regime during its most bloody period when the British government and the US administration were actually supporting that regime – as was confirmed by the 1996 Scott Inquiry. But we could see that this state, broken by sanctions and war, posed no military threat and that the WMD evidence was flimsy and confected, that going to war without United Nations authorization was profoundly dangerous, that foreign invasion and occupation would be resisted by force and it would set off a series of uncontrollable and destructive events.

If only this House had been able to listen to the wisdom of many of our own people when it voted on 18th March 2003 against waiting for UN authorization for a second resolution the course of events might have been very different. All but 16 of the members of the official opposition at that time supported the war – whilst many in my party voted against it – as did others in other opposition parties.

There are members here today on all benches including dozen of my labour colleagues who voted against the war. But none of us Mr. Speaker should take any satisfaction from this report. Instead, all of us, and I believe everyone.....

Thank you Mr. Speaker, we have to feel saddened at what has been revealed and what we must now reflect on that.

In addition to all those British service people and Iraqis, civilians and combatants who lost their lives in the conflict, there are many members of this House who voted to stop the war but who have not lived to see themselves vindicated by this report. First and foremost, Mr Speaker it would do us all well to remember Robin Cook who stood over there 13 years ago and said in a few hundred words in advance of the tragedy to come what has been confirmed by this report in more than two million words. The Chilcot Report has rightly dug deep into the litany of failures of planning for the occupation, the calamitous decision to stand down the Iraqi army and to dissolve the entire Iraqi state as a process of de-bathification.

But the reality is it was the original decision to follow the US president into this war in the most volatile region of the world and impose a colonial-style occupation that led to every other disaster. The government's September 2002 Dossier with its claim that declaring Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction that could be deployed in 45mins was only the most notorious of many deceptions. As Major General Michael Laurie told the inquiry – and I quote: "We knew at the time that the purpose of the dossier was precisely to make a case for war rather than setting out the available intelligence".

Military action in Iraq not only turned a humanitarian crisis into a disaster, it also convulsed the entire region just as intervention in Libya in 2011 has sadly left the country in the grip of warring militias and terror groups. And the Iraq war actually increased the threat of terrorism to our own country, as Baroness Manningham-Buller, former head of MI5 made clear to the inquiry. There are many lessons that need to be drawn from the Iraq war and the investigation carried out by Sir John Chilcot and his Inquiry for our government, our country, this parliament as well as for my party – and indeed every other Party. They include the need for a more open and independent relationship with the United States, and for a foreign policy based on upholding international law and the authority of the United Nations which always seeks peaceful solutions to international disputes. We also need, and the prime minister indicated this, much stronger oversight of the security and intelligence services, full restoration of proper cabinet government, and to give parliament the decisive say over any future decision to go to war based on objective information and not just through government discretion but through a War Powers Act that I hope this Parliament will pass.

And as, in the wake of Iraq our own and other western governments increasingly resort to hybrid warfare based on the use of drones and special forces, our democracy - and our democracy is crucial and important - needs to ensure that their use is subject to proper parliamentary scrutiny. There are no more important decisions a Member of Parliament ever gets asked to make than those relating to peace and war. The very least that MPs and the country should be able to expect is

rigorous and objective evidence on which to base their crucial decisions. We now know the House was misled in the run-up to the war and the House must now decide how it should deal with that 13 years later, just as all those who took the decisions laid bare in the Chilcot report must face up to the consequences of their action whatever they may be. Later today, I will be meeting a group of families of military servicemen and women who lost loved ones, Iraq war veterans and Iraqi citizens who have lost family members as a result of the war that the US and British governments launched in 2003.

I will be discussing with them our public and the Iraqi people the decisions taken by our then government that led this country into a war with terrible consequences. Quite gladly, Mr Speaker there are huge lessons for every single one of us today. We make decisions that have consequences that don't just go on for the immediate years – they go on for decades and decades afterwards. We need to reflect very seriously before we take any decisions again to take military action without realizing that the consequences of those will live with all of those for many decades to come [not understandable end].