



Chilcot Inquiry: an update

Standard Note: SNIA/6215

Last updated: 16 May 2014

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The Iraq Inquiry, chaired by Sir John Chilcot, was originally expected to have reported by now but the broad scope of the inquiry and the amount of evidence have led to delays in publication, which is now not expected until some time in 2014 at the earliest. This note provides a brief update on progress.

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1 The establishment of the inquiry

There were persistent calls for an inquiry into the initiation and conduct of the Iraq war, starting when troops were still in the country.¹ The government's policy was that there would be an inquiry when the time was right, after troops had withdrawn. Gordon Brown replaced Mr Blair in Number 10 in June 2007 and an inquiry was announced in June 2009. In his statement on the setting up of the inquiry, the then Prime Minister said that the inquiry would help learn lessons that would strengthen the United Kingdom's democracy, foreign policy and military forces:

I am today announcing the establishment of an independent Privy Counsellor committee of inquiry which will consider the period from summer 2001, before military operations began in March 2003, and our subsequent involvement in Iraq right up to the end of July this year. The inquiry is essential because it will ensure that, by learning lessons, we strengthen the health of our democracy, our diplomacy and our military.

The inquiry will, I stress, be fully independent of Government. Its scope is unprecedented. It covers an eight-year period, including the run-up to the conflict and the full period of conflict and reconstruction. The committee of inquiry will have access to the fullest range of information, including secret information. In other words, its investigation can range across all papers, all documents and all material. It can ask for any British document to be brought before it, and for any British citizen to appear. No British document and no British witness will be beyond the scope of the inquiry. I have asked the members of the committee to ensure that the final report will be able to disclose all but the most sensitive information—that is, all information except that which is essential to our national security.²

The terms of reference of the inquiry were described by Chairman Sir John Chilcot when the inquiry was launched:

Our terms of reference are very broad, but the essential points, as set out by the Prime Minister and agreed by the House of Commons, are that this is an Inquiry by a committee of Privy Counsellors. It will consider the period from the summer of 2001 to the end of July 2009, embracing the run-up to the conflict in Iraq, the military action and its aftermath. We will therefore be considering the UK's involvement in Iraq, including the way decisions were made and actions taken, to establish, as accurately as possible, what happened and to identify the lessons that can be learned. Those lessons will help ensure that, if we face similar situations in future, the government of the day is best equipped to respond to those situations in the most effective manner in the best interests of the country.³

The membership of the inquiry is the following:

- [Sir John Chilcot \(Chairman\)](#)
- [Sir Lawrence Freedman](#)
- [Sir Martin Gilbert](#)
- [Sir Roderic Lyne](#)

¹ For more information on the calls for an inquiry and other comparable investigations, see the Library standard note: [Iraq: calls for an inquiry](#), June 2007

² HC Deb 15 June 2009, c21-38

³ Iraq Inquiry website: [About the Inquiry](#)

- [Baroness Usha Prashar](#)⁴

2 Controversies

In 2009 there was disagreement about how public the evidence to the inquiry should be. In his launch statement, Gordon Brown said that the inquiry would hear evidence in private:

Like the Franks inquiry, this inquiry will take account of national security considerations—for example, what might damage or reduce our military capability in the future—and evidence will be heard in private. I believe that that will also ensure that evidence given by serving and former ministers, military officers and officials is as full and candid as possible.⁵

The Public Administration Committee published a report in June of that year disagreeing with that decision:

The need for effective accountability and public confidence demands that the inquiry be conducted as openly and publicly as possible. We recommend that the Government reconsiders its decision to conduct the Iraq inquiry in private.⁶

The committee also called for the inquiry to be divided into two halves, one on the original decision to go to war and the other to deal with the conduct of the war and its aftermath. It also said that Parliament should have been involved in the setting up of the inquiry and in setting its remit.

There has been comment about the release or otherwise of sensitive documents to the inquiry. Cabinet Office minister Francis Maude set out the government's position on the release of information in February 2011:

The protocol between the Iraq Inquiry and HMG regarding documents and other written and electronic information sets out the arrangements under which the Inquiry may request that the Government declassify documents for the Inquiry's public use and the grounds on which such requests may be refused. Documents that the Government have declassified are available on the Inquiry's website. The majority of the Inquiry's declassification requests has been met. Where no agreement is reached about a form in which the information can be published, it would remain open to the Inquiry to refer, in its report, to the fact that material it would have wished to publish has been withheld from publication.⁷

3 The hearings

The inquiry's first round of hearings began in autumn 2009 and continued into early 2010. After a break for the general election, the inquiry resumed its public hearings in June 2010 for five weeks. The Inquiry held its final round of public hearings between 18 January and 2 February 2011.

The hearings of some salient witnesses are listed below. Click on the date to go to the evidence and relevant declassified documents for that day:

Jack Straw MP

Foreign Secretary

[02 February 2011](#)

⁴ Iraq Inquiry website: [Committee members](#). Click on the links above to see biographies

⁵ HC Deb 15 June 2009, c23

⁶ Public Administration Select Committee *The Iraq Inquiry*, Ninth Report, HC 721 2008–9,

⁷ HC Deb 1 February 2011, c780W

		8 February 2010
Tony Blair	Prime Minister	21 January 2011
		29 January 2010
Dr Hans Blix	UN Monitoring Commission	27 July 2010
Eliza Manningham-Buller	Security Service	20 July 2010
Carne Ross	Diplomat at the UN	12 July 2010
Gordon Brown MP	Chancellor of the Exchequer	5 March 2010
Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup	Deputy Chief of Defence Staff	1 February 2010
Elizabeth Wilmshurst	Legal adviser, FCO	26 January 2010
Alistair Campbell	Director of Communications	12 January 2010
Jeremy Greenstock	Diplomat at the UN	27 November 2009

There have been calls for former Prime Minister Tony Blair to be recalled,⁸ but these were not acted upon and there are no plans for further hearings.

Before the report is published, opportunity will be given to those criticised in the report to respond to the comments (this is known as the 'Maxwellisation process'). In a letter to the Prime Minister, Sir John Chilcot said that the inquiry would not write to these people until the middle of 2013.⁹ The process of gathering individual responses and dealing with them may be quite drawn out.

4 Publication of the inquiry report

When the individuals have responded to criticisms in the report, it will be submitted to the Prime Minister as soon as possible. No date has been given for the publication of the report. On 2 February 2011, Sir John Chilcot said:

It is going to take some months deliver the report itself. I don't want to set an artificial deadline on our work at this stage. What I can say is that my colleagues and I want to finish our report as quickly as possible.¹⁰

An update on the inquiry website explained the delay:

Pulling together and analysing the evidence and identifying the lessons, for a report that covers so wide and complex a range of issues and a time period of some nine years, is a significant task. The Inquiry has advised the Government that it will need until at least summer 2012 to produce a draft report which will do justice to the issues involved. Very considerable progress has already been made, but there is still much to be done.

⁸ HC Deb 1 February 2012, c646W

⁹ [Letter from Sir John Chilcot to the Prime Minister](#), 13 July 2012

¹⁰ Iraq Inquiry website: [Frequently asked questions](#)

As well as drafting the report, the Inquiry will need to negotiate the declassification of a significant volume of currently classified material with the Government, to enable this to be quoted in, or published alongside, the Inquiry's report. That process has begun, but there will be a series of further major requests as drafting progresses. The Inquiry has made clear that it will need co-operation from the Government in completing this in a satisfactory and timely manner.¹¹

A press report suggested in October that publication might not happen until "much later" than summer 2012.¹² The press report attributed the delay to: "Damning criticism of Tony Blair and the way his government led Britain into invading Iraq and continuing rows over the disclosure of secret documents..."¹³

The government has denied that it is unduly blocking the release of documents, although there are persistent stories in the press about rows between the Cabinet Office and the Inquiry over the declassification of documents, including private messages from Tony Blair.¹⁴

A freedom of information request was lodged by a member of the public concerning some of the documents relevant to the Chilcot Inquiry to which the government responded by deciding to withhold them. Appeals to the Information Commissioner resulted in a decision that the Government was entitled to withhold most of the information, to avoid damage to the UK's international relations. The Government was instructed to release one document, however, but lodged another appeal, which has still to be decided.

Journalists have speculated that it may well be 2014 before the report is published. A campaigner against the war said that this is hurtful for the families of those affected:

The report was supposed to be published in 2011, when it was still a very hot potato, but by the time we eventually see it, people might think it was all a long time ago and that it doesn't really matter any more.

I can understand why Mr Blair and a few others don't want things to come out, because there was deceit behind closed doors. But for me and the other families, the delays just keep poking a wound that you're trying to heal. You try to put things in a box, but until this is done and dusted, you can't move on.¹⁵

On 15 May 2014, Bernard Jenkin MP, Chair of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, criticised the continued delay in publication. He said:

It's very serious that this report is now at least four years overdue, so we've written to the minister to ask for an explanation as to why these delays have occurred, what is holding up the publication of the report and how these issues are going to be resolved.¹⁶

Sir Jeremy Heywood, Cabinet Secretary, was particularly mentioned as being behind the obstruction of the release of records of conversations between Tony Blair and George W Bush. Mr Jenkin said that he might summon Francis Maude, Cabinet Office minister, or the civil servant to explain the situation:

¹¹ [Iraq Inquiry website](#)

¹² "Iraq war inquiry report delayed", *Guardian*, 16 November 2011

¹³ "Iraq war inquiry report delayed", *Guardian*, 16 November 2011

¹⁴ 'Families' anger at Iraq war report delays', *Daily Telegraph*, 27 December 2012

¹⁵ 'Families' anger at Iraq war report delays', *Daily Telegraph*, 27 December 2012

¹⁶ 'Iraq inquiry delay very serious, says senior Tory', *BBC News Online*, 16 May 2014

We may well call for the minister or indeed for the cabinet secretary to come and give us evidence to explain how they're going to sort this out.

5 Cost

The total cost incurred by the Inquiry from its establishment on 15 June 2009 up to 31 March 2012 was £6,129,000.¹⁷ On the present timetable, the Inquiry may incur further costs of some £2 million.

¹⁷ [Iraq Inquiry website](#)