

Good faith and (dis)honest mistakes? Learning from Britain's Iraq War Inquiry

The recent 'Chilcot' inquiry judged that British participation in the 2003 Iraq War was neither right nor necessary. When reading the final report of over 2.6 million words, I warn against seeking accountability solely in terms of intent and individual culpability, such as questioning whether the government deceived the public. There also needs to be an examination the rationalities and power relations that allowed figures such as Tony Blair to believe, and still believe, that the war was for the common good. Doing so reveals how the preemptive logics behind the war endure today.

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“If there's one thing that makes us hot, it's tougher questions, GO CHILCOT!”

“Blair lied. Thousands Died”

“Blair, you are a war criminal and a wanker”

- Chants and placards at The Iraq Inquiry, 2010

Introduction

On 6 July 2016, the British Government published the findings of the Iraq Inquiry, led by former civil servant Sir John Chilcot. The inquiry concluded that it was neither right nor necessary for the UK to have participated in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Former Prime Minister Tony Blair and other senior government figures had firmly argued their belief that the invasion was an act of collective security and a continuation of the doctrine of the international community (Ralph 2011). The doctrine states that intervention can be legitimate provided that five tests are met. The first two tests are: ‘are we sure of our case?’ and ‘have we exhausted all diplomatic options?’ Blair believed these tests were met. Chilcot did not. The inquiry concluded that the government committed several misdeeds and errors. Firstly, the case for war was based on a mistaken belief that Iraq had retained some chemical and biological weapon capabilities, was determined to enhance those capabilities, and was able to conceal them from United Nations inspectors. Secondly, Blair presented this belief to the public with “a certainty that was not justified” (Chilcot 2016). Thirdly, decisions based upon these beliefs were not properly scrutinised. In response, Blair apologized for mistakes made in good faith and with good motives. But he maintained his belief that the decision to invade Iraq was right, necessary and in the common interest of the international community (Blair 2016).

In this paper, I examine the different ways in which accountability for these mistakes and acts of good faith can be understood. While Chilcot provides some explicit recommendations, he also intends the reader to draw her own conclusions (Iraq Inquiry 2016a: 1). Illustrated by the slogans above, the inquiry has been besieged by demands to ask “tough” questions and to put “criminals” on trial. This is indicative of a political discourse that assigns legitimacy to methodological individualism - explaining the social world in terms of the *intentional* actions of rational, calculating agents (Weber 1978). I warn against a particular form, commonly found in the criminal courtroom, called *juridical individualism*. Juridical individualism restricts accountability to bad apples – that is, actors who intended to commit (or should have known that their actions would lead to) a transgression of the common good. This excludes the question of the bad barrel – that is, the ways in which actors’ motivations and perceptions of the common good were constituted. The Iraq Inquiry is an example of how the politics of security is shaped through interplay with everyday forms of public reason (Barnett 2015; Walter and D'Aoust 2015).

My claim is not that juridical individualism is a fruitless way to understand the pathologies of Britain’s role in the Iraq War. The middle section of the paper shows how the inquiry provides an important lesson based on a study of actors’ intentions. The inquiry answers a long-standing question as to whether government figures committed acts of deception. Chilcot finds no evidence for this. Instead, the report shows that senior figures like Blair were convinced by their own flawed interpretation of the threat posed by Iraq and refused to allow political opposition the opportunity to challenge this view. Officials concealed information that might have weakened the government’s case, Blair avoided Cabinet meetings in which his argument could have been challenged, and when Cabinet did meet there were few who were willing to challenge the Prime Minister. The government violated liberal standards of deliberation such as openness and a willingness to be persuaded (Bjola 2005). Chilcot’s recommendations attempt to reintroduce these standards,

which might have allowed political opponents to convince the government that the case for war was neither sure nor a last resort.

Yet juridical individualism, holding discrete actors to account in the name of the public good, is limited. Standards of deliberative democracy can provide security against actors with malign intent or apparently defective rationality, but even an ideal speech situation is encased by a particular form of public reason (Dean 1999). When a majority of actors sincerely believe that they are acting in the public interest, as Blair and many others did, mistakes and acts of good faith risk becoming comprehensible only as a misadventure that could not have been foreseen. Accountability needs to be extended to a study of the rationalities of governance that make violence possible as a social practice of the liberal state. In the final section of the paper, I show how the Chilcot archive contains a hidden lesson about these rationalities. After 11 September 2001, the British government perceived a dramatic change in the nature of terrorism. Blair embraced a logic of pre-emption because he believed that catastrophic threats could occur with little or no warning. This short-circuited the tests of the doctrine of the international community. Coupled with an inspections programme that produced uncertainty about Iraq, and a belief that Iraq would eventually have to be reformed into a free market economy, Blair sincerely believed that invasion was right and immediately necessary for the common good. Understanding the failures of the Iraq War as (dis)honest mistakes overlooks the way in which this logic of preemption continues unabated today. The destruction of uncertain objects has become an ever-present possibility in the security practices of the liberal state. A predilection for juridical individualism leads to a palliative discourse that ignores the rationalities of governance that give rise to these acts liberal violence.

Official inquiries and juridical individualism

The purpose of an official inquiry is to find facts and learn lessons from a controversial event (PASC, 2005: 8). This official account must establish whether a wrongdoing has taken place and, if it has, locate accountability. In so doing, inquiries attempt to re-establish the legitimacy of an authority under suspicion by isolating and sifting out the source of the wrongdoing (Rolston and Scraton 2005: 550). There are, however, many ways to think about this question of complicity (Kauzlarich et al 2003). Consider the hypothetical example of an inquiry into state-sponsored torture. If torture took place, what is answerable? Aside from those that did the torturing, perhaps some actors gave tacit encouragement by accepting information gained from torture. Perhaps there was bureaucratic failure whereby the activities of the torturers were not properly scrutinised. Perhaps a majority of the citizenry believe that torture is permissible in ticking bomb circumstances, and perhaps popular films and television programmes glamorise torture in way that reinforces such beliefs. These societal attitudes, and a nonfeasance whereby such attitudes go unchallenged, could be considered complicit as well. The inquiry must decide on where to set the limits of accountability.

These limits are shaped by methodological assumptions. Methods “make social worlds” by adhering to specific understandings of causation, structure and agency, and answerability (Law and Urry 2004). Some methods are more prevailing than others, particularly if we are historically accustomed to thinking of them as reasonable and proper. Public reason plays an important role here. An inquiry will only quell public suspicion when the audience implicitly endorses the method used by the inquiry to accept, reject and silence different truth claims. But this public reason is always contingent upon historical and cultural circumstances, even when an inquiry is widely convincing (Rolston and Scraton 2005). Herein lies the political problem: the decision over which methods to use is a power struggle between competing enactments of worlds, accountability and political interests (Huysmans and Aradau 2014) If any method gains hegemony, we naturalise one way of seeing the world, among many.

One established example is methodological individualism, which suggests that the social world can and must be explained as an aggregation of individual action, which in turn can be derived from statements about individual intention (Weber 1976). This paper concerns juridical individualism, commonly found in the criminal courtroom (Norrie 2014). Juridical individualism assumes that humans are *homo economicus*, rational utility maximisers. This facilitates a firm rule of legal doctrine: motive is irrelevant to criminal responsibility. By assuming that all individuals share the same motive (to seek pleasure and avoid pain), the question of criminality can rest on whether a person *intended* to commit the alleged act. If I steal a loaf of bread, and assuming that I did so intentionally and with full knowledge of the law, no one is answerable for the crime except me. Yet *homo economicus* is an abstraction that ignores and depoliticises the social and political contexts within which motives are formed (Ferber and Nelson 1993). This depoliticising effect is not an accident – it is essential to the maintenance of a liberal, capitalist society. Before juridical individualism, those charged with theft often justified their actions through abject poverty. Defendants could claim that they were not answerable for their crimes, rather the true injustice lay in the unequal distribution of wealth – so their disobedience of property law was grounded in public right (Norrie 2014: 45). *Homo economicus* made such claims irrelevant. The individual could be isolated and theft could be punished so long as there was intent to steal. This juridical individualism thus protected a particular notion of the public interest grounded in the distribution of property amongst the middle class. It did so by focussing on the question of *what* humans did whilst excluding the question of *why* they did it.

This juridical individualism can be found in the workings of official inquiries (Wight 2003; Coole 2005), reflecting a public discourse that recognises juridical methods as the most rigorous and legitimate means of conducting an investigation (Hanretty 2013). This discourse has been visible around the Chilcot inquiry. When the inquiry began in 2009, it was criticised for its lack of legal powers to require evidence under oath, and its lack of

scope to explicitly apportion individual blame, criminality and civil liability. The late MP Michael Meacher argued that the inquiry was “in keeping with this insidious culture of non-culpability” (2009). At the inquiry’s public hearings, these calls intensified. When Tony Blair gave evidence to the inquiry in January 2010, a large crowd gathered outside the building in which the hearing took place. Some carried familiar placards slogans alleging the former Prime Minister’s guilt: “BLAIR LIED THOUSANDS DIED” and “BLIAR”. Others, such as the campaign group 38 Degrees, encouraged Chilcot to ask Blair “tough” questions. The group hired cheerleaders to guide chants outside, such as: “If there’s one thing that makes us hot, it’s tougher questions, GO CHILCOT!” The night before the hearing, a 38 Degrees member visited the home of inquiry member Sir Roderic Lyne to deliver a cake and a list of 12,150 questions gathered by an online petition. The most popular questions illustrate a fixation with individual culpability: “When did you first promise George Bush you’d back an invasion?” “When did you really realise Saddam Hussein probably didn’t have WMD?” “Did you cover up advice that the war might be illegal?” (38 Degrees 2010) The questions are exemplary of juridical individualism. The majority of the questions focussed on two areas: “did Blair actually believe that going to war was a legitimate and necessary action, or was it a means to other ends, and were the steps that he took to persuade others to support him in this action themselves legitimate?” (38 Degrees 2010) These are questions about intent, and about whether the government was dishonest about the decision and process of going to war. They are questions about what individuals did, and not the social or political contexts in which these actions were performed.

Juridical individualism helps to protect a particular social and political status quo. In the courtroom, this exclusion of motive prevents defendants from challenging the values and rationalities of liberal state and society. The question is whether those values and rationalities need to be included within that which is answerability for wrongdoing regarding the Iraq War. In the next two sections, I show how an individualist reading of the

Iraq inquiry can identify some important lessons. However, answerability also needs to be extended to the rationalities of governance that made, and continue to make liberal war possible.

The lesson learned: recovering the force of better argument

The inquiry archive shows how government figures presented the case for war as a continuation of the 'doctrine of the international community', originally set out by Blair during the Kosovo conflict in 1999 (Ralph 2011). Under the doctrine, intervention can be legitimated as an act of collective security provided that five "tests" are met. The first two tests are: "are we sure of our case?" and "have we exhausted all diplomatic options?" (cited in Chilcot et al. 2016b: 174) While giving evidence to the inquiry, the Prime Minister and his advisors argued that these tests had been met (Blair 2010; Manning 2009; Powell 2010). Chilcot disagreed. Inquiry member Sir Lawrence Freedman originally suggested the tests to Blair and, during witness hearings, suggested that the invasion might not have happened had the tests been properly adhered to (Manning 2009: 70). The inquiry concluded that Iraq did not pose an imminent threat to the UK and the invasion took place before more peaceful options had been exhausted.

From a juridical individualist standpoint, answerability is attributed to those who intentionally transgressed the common good or should have known that their actions would do so. The question is whether government actors knew that the case for war was contrary to the doctrine *or* should have reached this conclusion. The former amounts to an act of deception, the latter is an indication of incompetence or negligence. There is a longstanding academic debate on which of these best characterises the British government's actions in the run-up to the war (for instance Coole 2005; Humphreys 2005; Herring and Robinson 2014). If an act of deception took place, this would not necessarily

mean that actors lied – that is, made a claim known to be false. Deception also includes forms of concealment or spin whereby an actor withholds or manipulates information in order encourage the audience to reach a conclusion *known to be inaccurate* (Herring and Robinson 2014: 558). Either way, an intention to mislead would invalidate the claim that the UK was sure of its case and sure that war was a last resort. In this section, I show how Chilcot’s analysis of the government’s failings follows an individualist path. The inquiry judged that the case for war was not right or necessary because, while there was an “ingrained belief” that Iraq was an urgent threat and possessed WMD, this belief was not properly challenged and was presented to the public with “a certainty that was not justified” (Chilcot 2016). This does not necessarily constitute a deception but does demonstrate an unwillingness to engage in a frank debate. Had the opportunity arisen, the government may have been defeated by the force of better argument.

Much attention has been paid to the so-called September Dossier – a summary of the UK’s intelligence on Iraq’s WMD capability, published in September 2002 by the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) with input from Downing Street. The dossier had little influence at the time but was subsequently regarded as a litmus test for the government’s honesty. Prior to Chilcot, two other inquiries investigated the dossier. In autumn 2003, Lord Hutton’s inquiry considered the allegation made by a BBC journalist that Downing Street had ordered for the dossier to be “sexed-up” with a claim that the government “probably knew” to be false (Hutton 2004: 105). This was the claim that some of Iraq’s WMD were “ready within 45 minutes of an order to use them” (HM Government 2002: 4), which led several British newspapers to report that citizens were at risk of attack from chemical or biological weapons mounted on long-range missiles. Hutton dismissed the allegation because, in his view, “sexing up” amounted to an allegation of lying – making a statement “known or believed to be false or unreliable” (Hutton 2004: 144). Strictly speaking, the government did not lie. Rather the dossier did not make it clear that the 45-minute claim referred only to battlefield munitions, not long-range missiles.

In February 2004, the Butler inquiry conducted a broader investigation of whether the government's public claims in the dossier and elsewhere had fairly represented the available secret intelligence. Butler concluded that the dossier "went to (although not beyond) the outer limits of the intelligence" (Butler 2004: 82). The government had advocated a *particular* interpretation of the intelligence, which Butler demonstrated by publishing extracts of the dossier side by side with the secret intelligence upon which the extracts were based.

TABLE ONE HERE

As the example illustrates, the dossier lacked the warnings contained in the raw intelligence and thereby may have given "the impression that the government possessed fuller and firmer intelligence than was the case" (Butler 2004: 82). Yet rather than an intentional deception, Butler judged that the authors had succumbed to a "groupthink" and were advocating an interpretation that they believed to be accurate (2004: 110). Blair stated that he believed the intelligence on Iraq was "extensive, detailed and authoritative", but the JIC assessments described intelligence as "sporadic and patchy" (Butler 2004: 164). Speaking in 2016 Butler explained, "I don't call that a lie. [Blair] *may well have thought* it was extensive, detailed and authoritative but it wasn't" (Butler 2016, my emphasis).

Chilcot reinforces this thesis that actors were convinced by their own interpretation. In the dossier foreword, Blair wrote that he "believe[d] the intelligence has established beyond doubt" that Iraq continued to produce and develop WMD (HM Government 2002: 3). Whilst not doubting Blair's sincerity, Chilcot was critical of Blair's "deliberate selection" of a statement grounded in *his* interpretation rather than the raw JIC assessments upon which these beliefs were based (Iraq Inquiry 2016c: 282). Blair's beliefs would have been influenced by the advice that he received. On 2 September 2002, the Foreign Office "unequivocally" advised Blair that Iraq was successfully hiding WMD (Iraq

Inquiry 2016c: 136). There was also a farcical episode surrounding an untested intelligence source discovered days before the dossier was published. The Secret Intelligence Service described the source as “phenomenal” and the “key to unlock” Iraq’s chemical and biological programme (Iraq Inquiry 2016c: 190). On 12 September, the Chief of SIS took the “rare” step of briefing the Prime Minister on the source because he could not “sit on something as important as that” (Iraq Inquiry 2016c: 194). The promised revelations may also have been used to suppress dissent from the Defence Intelligence Staff, who objected that the dossier’s claims could not be substantiated (Iraq Inquiry 2016c: 239; Herring and Robinson 2014). With a matter of weeks, however, intelligence analysts raised suspicions that the source’s description of “linked hollow glass spheres” containing chemical agents was remarkably, and suspiciously, similar to a fictional weapon portrayed in a 1996 Hollywood film, *The Rock* (Iraq Inquiry 2016c: 313). The source was formally withdrawn in July 2003.

There also evidence that officials deliberately concealed information that could have weakened the government’s argument. The Chair of the JIC explicitly recommended “obscuring” the fact that the intelligence suggested “nothing exceptional” about Iraq compared to other “countries of concern” such as Iran, North Korea, and Libya (Scarlett 2002; Iraq Inquiry 2016c: 76). Similarly, there were frequent concerns that the intelligence did not make a strong case for military action. Alastair Campbell wrote in his diary that the hardest question to answer was: “Why now? What was it that we knew now that we didn’t before that made us believe we had to do it now?” (Campbell in Iraq Inquiry 2016c: 140). Thirdly, caveats and qualifications that highlighted the uncertainty of the intelligence were removed from the dossier, against the advice of the Defence Intelligence Staff (Iraq Inquiry 2016c: 199-200). Some have suggested that this is evidence of deception because the drafters knew the basis of the government’s case was unreliable (Herring and Robinson 2014). Others have argued that by selecting only the information that supported the government’s case, the drafters believed that they were not misleading the audience, rather

they preventing others from doing so (Humphreys 2005: 168). For instance, a Cabinet Office official advised the JIC against the inclusion of caveats in the dossier because while caveats could “increase the authenticity of the document ... that needs to be weighed against the use that will be made by the opponents of action who will add up the number of judgements on which we do not have absolute clarity” (Bowen cited in Iraq Inquiry 2016c: 179). This pathology may not amount to deception. It perhaps a self-deception (Galeotti, 2015). But it is certainly a deliberate attempt to avoid resistance. Rather than debate the veracity of the government's belief in Iraq's WMD, Blair and his deputies wanted to educate the political opposition toward their evangelical belief (see Cook cited in Iraq Inquiry 2016d: 263).

This hubris was evidenced on eleven occasions when Blair made important decisions without consulting a Cabinet committee. These occasions included the determination that invasion was the only certain way to remove Saddam; the deployment UK forces for possible operations in southern Iraq; and the decision that Iraq was in material breach of UNSCR 1441 (which underpinned the government's legal justification for war). The former Cabinet Secretary Lord Turnbull recalls that Blair preferred to make decisions after informal meetings with a few select officials and ministers because he liked to “move fast” and “didn't want to spend a lot of time in conflict resolution” (Turnbull 2010). Yet Blair's informal meetings lacked an outside perspective that could challenge assumptions and mitigate groupthink (Iraq Inquiry 2016a: 59). When Blair did consult cabinet, members often submitted to the will of a Prime Minister who had rescued his political party and led them to a landslide election victory. He'd been right then, was he not right now? Blair “sheer psychological dominance” overrode the established doctrine of collective cabinet decision making (Chilcot 2016b). The purpose of Cabinet is to test policy decisions and assumptions through fearless debate. Had these decisions been exposed to such scrutiny, the inquiry argued, the government's claim that war was right and necessary may have been defeated.

In sum, a focus on individual intent reveals a significant pathology inasmuch as some figures with the Blair government displayed contempt for “the force of better argument” (Habermas 1996: 305; Strong 2017). Whilst the advocates for war may have been sincere, other standards of liberal publicity such as openness and a willingness to be persuaded were conspicuous by their absence. In response, Chilcot has provided specific lessons which attempt to reintroduce better deliberative testing of government policy (Iraq Inquiry 2016a: 129-141). When making use of secret intelligence, for example, there should be a clearer separation between analysis that can *inform* public debate, and policy arguments intended to *persuade* public debate. Future governments also need to make greater use of Cabinet as a space of free and fearless debate. In totality, these suggestions amount to an additional test for the doctrine of the international community: it is not enough to believe that the first five tests have been met, one must also be able to convince others and do so in a manner that avoids deception (Ralph 2011: 321).

There is, however, a limit to this individualist diagnosis. Deliberative standards can protect the community against individuals with the intent to deceive. But advocates for particular policy options, provided that they are sincere, will only be challenged when there is a will to do so. Even an ideal speech situation will always be limited by the rationalities of the participants (Dean 1999). Blair, and many others inside and outside government, sincerely believed that invasion was in the national interest. After Chilcot announced his findings, Blair accepted that he failed to challenge the intelligence, but maintained that there had been no intent to do wrong; the decision was “made in good faith” and “the world was and is better off without Saddam” (2016a). As well as asking whether Blair was sincere, open and willing to debate, we also need to ask how it was possible for Blair to believe that invasion was an act of collective security at all. What matters is not just whether individuals intended to obstruct deliberation in order to promote a particular claim, but how that claim to the common good was possible and reasonable. This extends accountability beyond intent toward to the constituents of motive. In the next section, I show how the inquiry

report can also provide a problematisation of the ways of thinking that made the British case for war possible.

A lesson lost? The inevitable mistakes of preemption

At the heart of Britain's case for war was a specific articulation of security. Discourses of security make a political community possible through particular practices and rationalities for both the identification of objects of insecurity and the governance of those objects (Dillon 1996: 12-39). The government's argument that invasion was an act of collective security was contingent on three interrelated practices and rationalities of governance. Firstly, the historic inspections regime that was intended to increase trust in the Iraqi regime actually produced greater uncertainty. Secondly, after September 2001 the British government perceived a dramatic change in the nature of terrorism, leading to a shift toward a preemptive rather than precautionary logic of prevention. Finally, the invasion of Iraq was seen an opportunity to hasten its inevitable free market reform. Taken together, these past practices, present anxieties, and future imaginaries allowed the government to believe that the tests of the doctrine of the international community had been met.

After the Gulf War in 1991, the UN attempted to impose a panopticonic surveillance program upon Iraq. Inspectors were given the authority to inspect any place at any time. By giving Iraq the constant impression of its own surveillance, the inspections were intended to make Iraq a docile subject (Debrix 1999). The all seeing eye, however, exacerbated mistrust and suspicion. Certainty through transparency proved to be an impossible dream, partly because of the behaviour of the Iraqi regime and partly because of the inspections programme itself. In the former, Iraqi officials regularly obstructed the process. When, for instance, the inspectors identified buildings that might contain incriminating evidence, upon arrival they were forced to wait for several hours before being allowed to enter (Blix 2005:33). In the latter, however, the inspections themselves increased

suspicion. The task of the inspections was to prove an *absence* – that Iraq had disarmed itself. The problem was that “an absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence” (Blix cited in Iraq Inquiry 2016d: 134). When inspectors discovered scraps of evidence, it was often impossible to tell whether these were remnants of a long-gone weapons programme or the first glimpse of a secret plot. The inspections fuelled a suspicion that there was a guilty secret to be found (Thomas 2015).

This suspicion sustained the British government’s belief that Iraq retained and wanted to enhance its WMD capabilities. Despite the lack of significant finds by weapons inspectors, the government believed that Iraq’s obstructive behaviour was an attempt to conceal WMD assets. The JIC made over-cautious or worst case estimates of Iraqi capabilities (Iraq Inquiry 2016c: 11). Intelligence analysts convinced themselves that the gaps in their knowledge about Iraq were a testament to the success of the regime’s deception. Chilcot notes that “at no stage in the months before the war did the intelligence community or government consider that Iraq might no longer have the weapons or programmes supposed” (Iraq Inquiry 2016a: 45). Alternative explanations for Iraq’s obstruction, such a desire to deter Iran or to protect national pride, were discounted (Jervis, 2009).

The belief that containment and inspections had failed to make Iraq a docile subject allowed Blair to argue that non-military options had been exhausted. Speaking to Cabinet in March 2003, Blair argued that the decision over whether to take action “boiled down to the question of whether Saddam Hussein would ever voluntarily cooperate with the UN to disarm Iraq” (Iraq Inquiry 2016c: 596). Blair’s view was that military action was the only means to guarantee the authority of the United Nations and resolve the uncertainty about Iraq’s capabilities and intent. The apparent failure of inspections, however, does not explain why the invasion was necessary at *that* time. The necessity of war was driven by a “fusion” of these concerns with “post-9/11 concerns about mass-casualty

terrorism” (Iraq Inquiry 2016a: 42). It is this fear, the vision of the future it created, and the pre-emptive behaviour that it led to, which I now discuss.

Preemptive action is made reasonable when the future is perceived as uncertain, not only due to a gap in knowledge but because complex interdependencies create the possibility of disasters that could occur with little or no warning. In these circumstances, life is “tensed on the threshold of disaster” (Anderson 2010: 780). Such threats cannot be addressed through precautionary measures intended to stop an object from reaching a point of irreversible catastrophe. Instead, preemption radically transforms an object that is perceived to be a possible cause of the imminent future threat, because there are no reliable means of predicting this irreversible point of no return.

At the inquiry, Blair described how September 11 2001 introduced this imminent threat: ‘what really changed ... the calculus of risk for me: if those people, inspired by this religious fanaticism could have killed 30,000, they would have’ (Blair 2010). This rationality reverberated within Downing Street and Whitehall. Rather than regard 11 September as a temporary irregularity in the order of things, the attacks were a sign of a new future. A JIC assessment judged that Islamic extremists might try to use chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear devices to deliberately cause mass casualties. The assessment claimed, “what had seemed a remote possibility has become a fact.” Even if one plot was foiled, “copycat attacks could follow. Some terrorists might feel driven to match or exceed the scale of casualties in order to achieve a comparable impact” (cited in Iraq Inquiry 2016c: 38). By November 2001, Blair encouraged President Bush to address Iraq as part of a wider counter-terrorism strategy and by early December Blair suggested a strategy of regime change that could eventually require military action (Iraq Inquiry 2016a: 11). As an official explained to Jack Straw, “what has changed is not the pace of Saddam's WMD programmes, but our tolerance of them post-11 September” (Ricketts 2002). In a personal note sent to Bush in July 2002, Blair explained that “getting rid of Saddam is the right thing to do. He is a potential threat. He could be contained. But containment, as we found with

Al Qaida, is always risky” (Blair 2002). During a meeting with Bush at Camp David in September 2002, Blair explained they both needed to “get over to our publics” the nature of the threat. Blair wrote that there was:

a natural reluctance to do things, made worse by ignorance...of Saddam’s capabilities and intentions. We had to correct this, at the same time answer the legitimate question of why we were taking action now. 11 September was a powerful argument for dealing with threats before they materialised...At some point, WMD and terrorism would come together, with appalling consequences, unless we took action. (cited in Iraq Inquiry 2016c: 164)

Blair’s embrace of pre-emption short-circuited the first two tests of the doctrine of the international community. The questions of whether ‘we are sure of our case’ or ‘have exhausted all other options’ are answered very differently from a preemptive logic. The first test legitimates war as a least-worst option only when it saves more lives than it destroys. A preemptive logic disrupts this calculus of benefit versus harm to the point that inaction becomes unbearably dangerously. The number of lives lost in an invasion can plausibly be calculated but a future terrorist attack could kill an almost unimaginable number. Equally, it was not that the second test of last resort was an unaffordable luxury. Rather a rationality of preemption changed what counted as the moment of last resort. The Chilcot report shows how the tests are vulnerable to shifting discourses of insecurity and changes in anticipatory logic.

Speaking at the inquiry, Blair argued that the war “isn’t about a lie or a conspiracy ... it is a decision” and “today, we are going to be faced with exactly the same types of decisions” (Blair 2010) Here, Blair is right. Chilcot suggests that the Iraq War was the product of circumstances “unlikely to be repeated again” (Iraq Inquiry 2016c: 129). But these preemptive logics are found in contemporary security practices. For instance,

Britain's counterterrorism practices act upon identities and behaviours that may be indicative of an emergent threat (Heath-Kelly 2012). Similarly, drone "signature strikes" kill individuals when their "patterns of life" suggest potentially dangerous future behaviour (Boyle 2013). Common to all these practices are acts of state violence against objects subsequently revealed to be false positives, but these acts are defended as decisions made in good faith in order to prevent catastrophe. An alternative approach, however, is to understand these so-called mistakes as necessary consequences of pre-emption. These events are not mistakes but rather the resolution of subjects who occupy the space between the trusted community and the imagined attack. Heath-Kelly puts it simply: preemptive logics "lead to slippery trigger fingers" (2012: 83). The apparent mistake is a necessary consequence of a preemptive rationality coupled with a perceived gap in knowledge, that is impossible to close, between the present behaviour of the object and the terrible future that represents one possible future out of many. By waging war, killing or detaining, the liberal state closes and conceals this gap in knowledge. In order to establish answerability for these practices, we must question the ways of thinking that inform actor's intent. While Blair refused, many now apologise for the mistake of the Iraq War. But by accepting the discourse of the mistake we collude with rather critique the power relations responsible (Vaughan-Williams 2007).

This leads to the final constituent of the British government's motives for war. A preemption is an act of transformation, reshaping an object of insecurity so it is compatible with a particular way of life (Anderson 2010:790). The invasion did not just remove the Iraqi regime, it provided an opportunity to create something in its place. This opportunity was the integration of Iraq into the neoliberal economy (Kiersey 2010). Government plans from February 2003 assert that "a successful mission means winning the peace as well as the war". The UK's objectives would be achieved when Iraq had been "radically changed for the better", and an essential part of this change would be a liberal, "free market economy" (HM Government 2002b). The planning for this task began over

seven months before the invasion, as the Foreign Office began to consider the “huge job” of “dismantling Ba’ath Party economic control and corruption and replacing it with competent, transparent market-orientated management” (HM Government 2002c). After the invasion, the Coalition Provisional Authority eradicated import tariffs and trade barriers, and deregulated wage protections and the labour market, firmly establishing rules that facilitated the autonomy of market actors (Whyte 2010). On the one hand, these structural reforms had long been regarded as an opportunity for British energy security and commercial success. In December 2001, the Secret Intelligence Service argued that the removal of Saddam was ‘a prize because it could give new security to oil supplies’ (Dearlove 2001). In October 2002, British officials met with BP and Shell to discuss their commercial interests in Iraq and ensure “a fair slice of the action for UK companies in a post-Saddam Iraq” (Iraq Inquiry 2016e: 256). On the other hand, this investment in Iraq’s economy would be essential in order to create “an Iraq sharing the wealth created by its economy with all Iraqis” (HM Government 2003). This well-meaning project in the name of the international community was underpinned by the constitutive effects of global economy.

The inquiry concluded that this post-invasion reform failed because Blair and the government failed to plan for anything less than a best case scenario. The challenges, for instance, resulting from Iraq’s descent into “internecine” conflict were unanticipated (Iraq Inquiry 2016e: 86). Yet this criticism concerns only the *enactment* of a governing rationality – not the rationality of transforming life in a particular way in order to protect life elsewhere. In fact, speaking after the publication of the report, Blair reiterated this rationality.

I don’t think that this struggle was in vain in the end...I see the struggle that is going on in the Middle East which is all to do with these countries [getting to] religiously tolerant and pluralistic societies, getting to rule-based economies ...what we did in removing Saddam had terrible consequences that we did not foresee, and I

understand all the criticism, but when I look at it today...I think we still we *moved with the grain of where the future is going to be* in the country and in the region... (Blair 2016b, my emphasis)

Blair's remarks are strikingly reminiscent of the Kantian claim to "a concealed plan of nature" (Kant 2006: 13). Blair lessens the harm of the mistake because the decision to go to war was an attempt to hasten the realization of what nature would do in time. Within the Chilcot report, it goes unchallenged that emancipation would be best achieved through market reform. The question of whether 'we are sure of our case' could be answered with greater certainty within Downing Street because the intervention generated an opportunity to restructure Iraq into a free market economy, which it would eventually have to become.

Concluding remarks

An inquiry is an exercise in public reason. We should then recall Foucault's warnings of an apparent "blackmail of the Enlightenment" whereby one is forced to be either for or against reason when this reason is actually a contingent knowledge (1984: 42). Foucault's argument is not that we must reject reason. We can, however, understand that so much as the Enlightenment is an attempt to define the limits of knowledge, this stands in opposition to the constant critique of ourselves. Otherwise, we fail to recognize that our own reason must be conditioned by historical and cultural circumstances.

There are two blackmails in this episode. The first concerns the blackmail of juridical individualism. Attributing answerability to the practices and logics that informed Blair's claims could be seen as excusing his guilt. But casting Blair into the desert with the sins of the community performs the same function as hanging peasant thieves. It protects a particular construction of the common interest. Juridical individualism is not a wrong way to investigate controversies. It can be used to identify important lessons about the value of

security through deliberation. But focusing on what actors do and intend excludes a consideration of the power relations that constitute those behaviours as desirable and possible. Moving beyond juridical individualism allows us to unpick the second blackmail. This is the blackmail of ‘what if?’ In the immediate wake of the Chilcot report, Blair said, “I can regret the mistakes... but I sincerely believe that we would be in a worse position if we hadn’t acted ...if someone wants to disagree they should at least [engage with] the counterfactual. What if we’d left [Saddam] there?” (Blair 2016b) But to engage with this counterfactual already begins to buy into a preemptive logic by speculating on what might be. A far more helpful question might be, how was it possible for Blair to ask that counterfactual?

Finally, we might view the blackmail of juridical individualism as a condition of possibility for the liberal state. The purpose of an inquiry is to provide accountability and public reassurance by isolating and sifting out the source of wrongdoing. An individualising account of the Iraq War can assign a controversy to the past by identifying a few bad apples or an institutional failure. This elides questions about logics of security and the political economy of war. In turn, this serves a political purpose by preventing consideration of how violence is made possible, maybe even necessary, by ways of thinking and acting that are endemic to the liberal state and society. In this way, individualism functions as a palliative discourse, providing the audience with relief from the symptoms of the problem while ignoring the deeper rationalities and practices that give rise to these acts of violence and exclusion. Breaking with this juridical individualism in public and official discourse would make the task of learning lessons radically different. It would make the distinction between past and present, the accountable and the innocent, far harder to maintain. The resort to individualism may be a highly sophisticated and anonymous means of ensuring that these questions are not asked.

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TABLE ONE

Quotation from secret intelligence	Quotation from the dossier
<p>Recent intelligence casts light on Iraq's holdings of weapons of mass destruction and on its doctrine for using them. Intelligence remains limited and Saddam's own unpredictability complicates judgements about Iraqi use of these weapons. Much of this paper is necessarily based on judgement and assessment.</p>	<p>...significant additional information is available to the Government from secret intelligence sources...This intelligence cannot tell us about everything. However, it provides a fuller picture of Iraqi plans and capabilities.</p>

Figure 1. Extract from Butler's Report (2004: 81)