

Letter to Parliamentarians

The Need for an Iraq War Inquiry

Dear Parliamentarian

I am writing to you to express my concern that, eleven years after Australia participated in the invasion of Iraq, there has still been no comprehensive inquiry into the process by which the Government of the day made the decision that Australia would be a participant in the war.

Given the gravity of any decision to commit the Australian defence force to international armed conflict, the Australian people are entitled to know how that decision was made, and what evidence informed the decision. Like any world class defence force, the Australian Defence Force is assiduous in reviewing the conduct of every campaign in which it is involved, to identify and document the lessons learned, and incorporate them into the development of future doctrine. Surely the Australian Government owes to those it puts in harm's way to evaluate the quality of the processes by which it decides to put them in harm's way.

In the civilian domain, we are accustomed to holding inquiries after natural disasters and man-made accidents. We rigorously debate and scrutinise government administration and expenditure, how prepared we were to deal effectively with problems and how well our command and control systems worked. We carefully investigate the causes of deaths and injuries. All of this is designed so we can learn from experience and avoid future mistakes and losses. The Iraq war should be treated no differently.

Britain's inquiry into the Iraq war, conducted by Sir John Chilcot, plans to report its findings soon. This means that while Britons will have the chance to learn from past decisions, Australians will still be deprived of a comprehensive account of our involvement in Iraq.

An independent inquiry into the decision making process which led to Australia's involvement in Iraq would also allow for a public discussion of the appropriateness of Australia's current 'war powers', which concentrate power in the executive branch. This could provide a framework for reforming how the decision is made to go to war.

The experience of Parliamentary and Congressional debate in Britain and the United States last year over the question of whether to intervene in Syria demonstrated the benefits of parliamentary involvement in decisions to commit to armed international conflict. By allowing for greater public debate, the involvement of parliament permitted better evidence to be obtained, and cooler heads to prevail. This experience has demonstrated the value of moving the 'war powers' from the executive to the Parliament, ensuring a better deliberative process and greater accountability.

The Campaign for an Iraq War Inquiry hopes to see not only an independent inquiry into Australia's involvement in the Iraq War, but also a commitment from Australia's elected representatives to reforming the 'war powers'.

Yours sincerely

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