Moral issues of Iraq war still with us

What should we do about dictatorial despots who murder their own people?

ANDREW MACLEOD

On February 8, 2003, a short time before the Iraq war began, I wrote on these pages that Iraq posed a great moral dilemma for the West. While Britain's Chilcot report released this week will focus attention on Bush and Blair's failings, the underlying moral dilemma nevertheless still remains today.

I did not accept then, nor do I accept now, that the arguments on weapons of mass destruction or terrorism were valid. The Chilcot Inquiry report shows, in exquisite multimillion-word detail, that intelligence estimates were poorly justified and arguably misused.

"I will be with you, whatever," Blair wrote to Bush.

"Military adventurism is wrong," some will write. "Bush and Blair should be charged as war criminals," some will say.

Well many people hold anger in their hearts at the results of the war. Yet, if we take the lesson from Iraq, that intervention is always wrong, do we not condemn people to unnecessary suffering if we fail to intervene when needed? An anger focused on Bush and Blair, creating a belief in universal non-intervention, will do nothing to solve the moral dilemma when countries butcher their own people.

In 2008, I wrote of the cost of non-intervention based on my experiences of working for the International Committee of the Red Cross in Rwanda and Yugoslavia in the 1990s. I wrote then:

"In 1994, the world had advance warning of the Rwandan genocide. The world, Australia included, ignored the pleas of General Dallaire, the UN force commander, when he asked for a mere 2500 soldiers to stop genocide from happening.

"Just 100 days later, up to 1 million people were dead. That is 10,000 a day, every day, for 100 days. That was the cost of non-intervention."

"In 1992, the Europeans (especially the French and the Germans) said to the US that Bosnia was a European problem and that the US should keep out. "We will fix it," they said. For three years, the Europeans tried and failed, and 250,000 people died before the US intervened. That was the cost of non-intervention.

Iraq was not a peaceful and stable society before the war. It was a society ripped with fear and brutally ruled by a bloodthirsty tyrant who killed hundreds of thousands.

In 2002, Amnesty International reported that in the 10 years prior to war, Saddam had killed between half a million and a million people. "Something must be done about Saddam Hussein," they called.

I wrote in 2003, "To say 'continue with diplomacy' is to say 'continue with rape, murder and torture'. To say 'it is not our problem' is to say 'continue with rape, murder and torture'. To say 'the US is a global imperialist that just wants to control the oil' is to say 'continue with rape, murder and torture'. Anything except regime change is to say 'continue with rape, murder and torture'."

Like Amnesty International I believed "something" had to be done about Saddam Hussein.

Some will respond to the above by saying "that is not why they went to war". Blair pleads for us to "think in his shoes" of what to do with imper-