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## Foreign Correspondent: The Reckoning

Airs Tuesday July 5 at 9.30pm on ABC & iview

**It deposed tyrant Saddam Hussein but led to hundreds of thousands of deaths, lit sectarian conflict and helped the rise of ISIS. Was the Iraq war justified? Thirteen years on, a major British inquiry is set to pass judgment.**

**ABC chief foreign correspondent Philip Williams reports.**

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January 2005. A young Australian navigator named Paul Pardoel boards a British air force Hercules for a routine daylight mission over Iraq. He is looking forward to getting it done and going home to his family.

*When he left it was like, "Kellie, this is it! This is my last deployment!" – Kellie Merritt*

Hours later Paul Pardoel is among the 10 men killed on board – victims of a surface-to-air missile strike, compounded by faulty aircraft equipment and intelligence.

*And there you have this widow who's actually quite pissed off and doesn't want to cry in front of the coffin. I actually just want to say, you know what, "Why? This shouldn't have happened." – Kellie Merritt*

For more than a decade, Kellie Merritt has wanted answers for herself and their three children - not just about the mission's defects but also about the political justifications for the war, and about how the big decisions were made.

Now she may be about to get them. On Wednesday a seven year inquiry by retired civil servant Sir John Chilcot is due to report on Britain's involvement in the Iraq War, including how Whitehall's key players handled claims that Saddam had stashed weapons of mass destruction and collaborated with Al Qaeda. The findings will resonate in Australia, a member of the "coalition of the willing".

ABC chief foreign correspondent Philip Williams taps into the hopes and expectations surrounding the Chilcot inquiry through the eyes of bereaved Australian and British families and insiders from the time. Williams was based in London as Tony Blair and allied leaders rallied for war:

*We will stand up for what we know to be right, to show that we will confront the tyrannies and dictatorships and terrorists who put our way of life at risk – Tony Blair, March 2003*

*The people of the US and our friends and allies will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder – George W Bush, March 2003*

*The Government has decided to commit Australian forces to action to disarm Iraq because we believe it is right, it is lawful and it is in Australia's national interest – John Howard, March 2003*

Families whose loved ones died in Iraq want Chilcot to deliver the undiluted truth about pre-war political manoeuvrings. Some, like Paul Pardoel's family, hope the inquiry might bring lasting change about how we make such momentous decisions – with more transparency and public debate. Some cannot forgive.

*I want Blair to be destroyed; he's the figurehead for the war* – Sarah O'Connor, whose brother Bob died on the Hercules with Paul Pardoel

But British insiders say any blame should not be Blair's alone. Philip Williams meets a former top military planner who, in a remarkable admission, regrets that top brass and ministers failed to challenge Blair about what would happen after the initial invasion.

*The plan is: we don't need a plan. People didn't criticise, they didn't push back enough at Blair* - former military planner

Tony Blair's allies are now bracing for a broad political assault after Chilcot lands.

*This is about the demonisation of Tony Blair, a desire on the left and right to damage permanently his reputation* – former Blair staffer

**“The Reckoning” - *Foreign Correspondent* 9.30pm Tuesday July 5 and 10.30am Thursday July 7 & on ABC & iview, and 6.30pm AEST Saturday July 9 on ABC News 24.**

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For further information contact:

**Chris Chamberlin, News Publicist, ABC TV Publicity**

02 83333 2154 | 0404 075 749 | [chamberlin.chris@abc.net.au](mailto:chamberlin.chris@abc.net.au)

@popculturechris