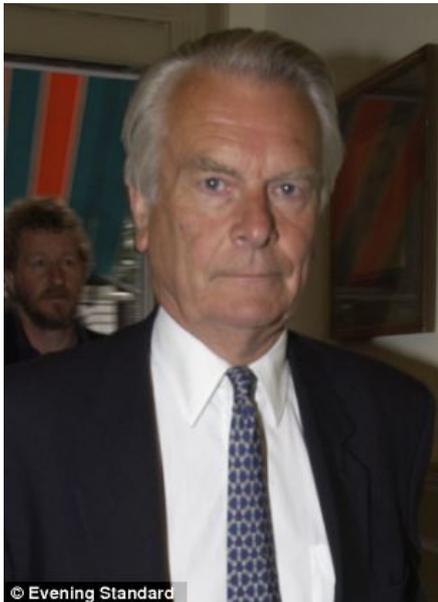


Cabinet boss must not decide on Iraq papers, says Owen: Former Foreign Secretary demands Sir Jeremy Heywood is stripped of responsibility because he worked closely with Tony Blair

- **Inquiry chairman Sir John Chilcot said last week that his probe has stalled indefinitely because Sir Jeremy is blocking the release of correspondence**
- **Sir Jeremy was Principal Private Secretary to Tony Blair between 1999-2003**

By [Tim Shipman](#): **Published:** 22:22, 12 November 2013



Former Labour Foreign Secretary David Owen (pictured) has demanded that Sir Jeremy Heywood be stripped of responsibility for deciding whether key documents can be published by the Iraq Inquiry

David Owen has demanded that Cabinet Secretary Sir Jeremy Heywood be stripped of responsibility for deciding whether key documents can be published by the Iraq Inquiry.

The inquiry chairman Sir John Chilcot complained last week that his probe has stalled indefinitely because Sir Jeremy is blocking the release of correspondence between Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and US President George W. Bush.

But Lord Owen, who was a Labour Foreign Secretary in the late 70s, said Sir Jeremy is not the right 'arbiter' of whether the papers are released since he also worked closely with Mr Blair in the run up to war.

In a letter to David Cameron yesterday, Lord Owen wrote: 'Sir Jeremy Heywood was Principal Private Secretary to Tony Blair in No 10 from 1999-2003, the very time when the decisions to go to war were being taken.

'I cannot believe that now as Cabinet Secretary he can be the arbiter as to whether documents should be published between Sir John Chilcot and Tony Blair.

'It is obvious that there are differences of opinion as Sir John writes in his letter to you that it is "regrettable that the Government and the Inquiry have not reached" an agreement.'

In a direct challenge to the Prime Minister, Lord Owen urged Mr Cameron to assert his authority and hand the responsibility to Lord Chancellor Chris Grayling, who already has responsibility for deciding which government papers can be released under the 30-year rule.

'Who is the Government?' he asks, 'You as Prime Minister? The Cabinet? Surely not for the reasons I have given, the Cabinet Secretary?

'I suggest you ask the Lord Chancellor to form a judgement on behalf of the Government as to what papers can be released.'

He added: 'The Iraq Inquiry involves a decision to declare war and from the moment it was established it was clear it would involve examination of international discussions between British Prime Ministers and US Presidents. If there is a precedent it is the inquiry held during the First World War to examine the Dardanelles.'

In a letter to Mr Cameron last week, Sir John revealed that he has asked for 'more than 130 records of conversations' between Mr Brown, Tony Blair and Mr Bush to be declassified. The hold up has also involves whether to make public '25 Notes from Mr Blair to President Bush' and 'some 200 Cabinet-level discussions'.

In his letter, Sir John said: 'It is regrettable that the Government and the Inquiry have not reached a final position on the disclosure of these more difficult categories of document



Lord Owen pointed to the fact Sir Jeremy was Principal Private Secretary to Tony Blair between 1999-2003

A Cabinet Office spokesman said: 'The Inquiry and Government agreed in the Inquiry's Documents Protocol that the Cabinet Secretary should be the final arbiter of declassification - that remains unchanged and has the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister's full support.'

'At the outset the Government assured the Inquiry of its full cooperation and it continues to do so.'

Allies of Sir Jeremy pointed out that Mr Cameron has asked the Cabinet Secretary to take a lead on the declassification of the documents 'and that remains his view'.

The Prime Minister has repeatedly relied on Sir Jeremy - for instance on the No 10 probe of the plebgate allegations against former chief whip Andrew Mitchell - where MPs think he should have given the responsibility to others.