



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

EXPANDING THE RECORD: U.S. RELATIONS WITH  
AHMAD CHALABI 1991-2010

by

PAUL JOHN SORRELL

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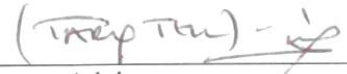
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## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Paul John Sorrell for Master of Arts  
Major: Middle Eastern Studies

Title: Expanding the Record: U.S. Relations with Ahmad Chalabi 1991-2010

This thesis explores the relationship between the United States government and Iraqi politician Ahmad Chalabi between the founding of the Iraqi National Congress in 1991 and the Iraqi Parliamentary elections of 2010. The following pages chart through a non-theoretical analysis the rise and fall of Ahmad Chalabi from his family's time as successful politicians and businessmen in Hashemite Iraq, Chalabi's time in exile, his early interactions with the U.S. government, and his tenure as a political operator in post-Ba'athist Iraq. Instances of political and press manipulation, corruption, sectarianism, and political maneuvering will all be examined with the purpose of creating a more comprehensive record of U.S.-Chalabi interactions. With this thesis I will argue that Chalabi's actions were self-serving and divisive and ultimately hindered the reconstruction of Iraq.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| AEI    | American Enterprise Institute                         |
| AJC    | Accountability and Justice Commission                 |
| ARC    | Accreditation and Review Committee                    |
| CIA    | Central Intelligence Agency                           |
| CPA    | Coalition Provisional Authority                       |
| DIA    | Defense Intelligence Agency                           |
| FBI    | Federal Bureau of Investigation                       |
| FIF    | Free Iraqi Forces                                     |
| HNDC   | Higher National De-Ba'athification Commission         |
| HUMINT | Human intelligence                                    |
| IAEA   | International Atomic Energy Agency                    |
| IESC   | Internal Executive Steering Committees                |
| IGC    | Iraqi Governing Council                               |
| IIG    | Iraqi Interim Government                              |
| INA    | Iraqi National Alliance                               |
| INA    | Iraqi National Accord                                 |
| INC    | Iraqi National Congress                               |
| IST    | Iraqi Special Tribunal                                |
| ITG    | Iraqi Transitional Government                         |
| JAM    | Jaysh al-Mahdi  |
| KDP    | Kurdistan Democratic Party                            |
| MNF-I  | Multi-National Force-Iraq                             |
| NSC    | National Security Council                             |
| ORHA   | Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance |
| PNAC   | Project for a New American Century                    |
| PUK    | Patriotic Union of Kurdistan                          |
| SCIRI  | Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq    |
| SOMO   | State Oil Marketing Organization                      |
| TBI    | Trade Bank of Iraq                                    |
| UIA    | United Iraqi Alliance                                 |

# MAP OF BAGHDAD-AL-KADHIMIYYA

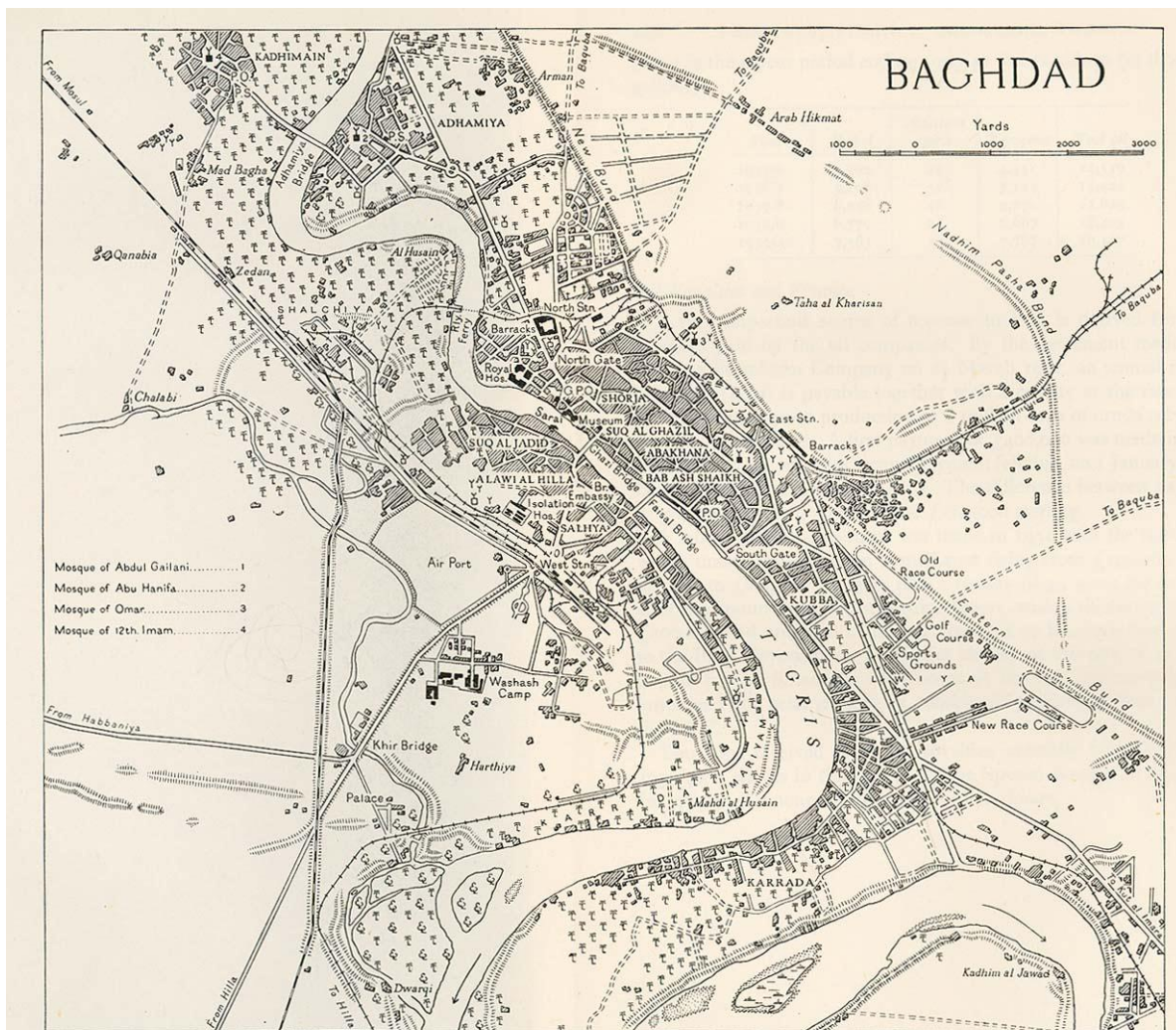


FIG. 79. Plan of Baghdad

# MAP OF IRAQ



# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Ahmad Chalabi's role in the 2003 invasion of Iraq is a subject of considerable controversy and debate. Much of this discussion starts and ends with the faulty intelligence he provided to the United States government and press through a U.S. funded opposition group, the Iraqi National Congress, from 2001-2002. This, however, ignores decades of behavior that provide vital context for his personal campaign to overthrow Saddam Hussein and its tragic consequences. There are many from the American side who maintain that had Chalabi not appeared and deceived the United States, the whole debacle in Iraq could have been avoided. This ignores deep rooted political currents within the U.S. government since the end of the first Gulf War which finally crested in 2003. Chalabi cannot be blamed for leading the U.S. to war, but he can be blamed for energizing the debate on regime change and contributing to a political environment in which an appetite for war was awakened. It is fair to assert that Chalabi did shrewdly and deftly cultivate a network of influential individuals within the broader American political system in order to create the conditions for regime change in Iraq. But again, this does not mean that the blame for the United States' failures in Iraq falls squarely on his shoulders. Instead, what is important to study are the events surrounding the invasion and its aftermath to determine how the debacle came to be.

With his recent death on November 2, 2015, mentions of Chalabi and his life have resurfaced in an array of obituaries. He was described as “a huckster who peddled magical thinking”<sup>1</sup>; “unstintingly adored”<sup>2</sup>; “brilliant, mercurial, charming, and ultimately unknowable”<sup>3</sup>; a “dirty tricks coordinator”<sup>4</sup>; “domineering”<sup>5</sup>; “Machiavellian”<sup>6</sup>; “a masterful manipulator”<sup>7</sup>; “the darling of the US neocons”<sup>8</sup>; and of course “controversial.”<sup>9</sup> These were written from a public perception of Chalabi after he had ceased to be a major player in the inner workings of Iraq, and had mostly faded from public view in the West.

---

<sup>1</sup> Gideon Rose, “Why America Invented Ahmad Chalabi,” *The New York Times*, November 5, 2015, accessed December 7, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/05/opinion/why-america-invented-ahmad-chalabi.html>.

<sup>2</sup> “The theory of knots,” *The Economist*, November 18, 2015, accessed December 7, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/obituary/21678736-ahmad-chalabi-man-who-persuaded-america-invade-iraq-died-november-3rd-aged-71>.

<sup>3</sup> Dexter Filkins, “Postscript: Ahmad Chalabi,” *New Yorker*, November 3, 2015, accessed December 8, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/postscript-ahmad-chalabi>.

<sup>4</sup> David Ignatius, “Ahmad Chalabi, the master manipulator,” *The Washington Post*, November 5, 2015, accessed December 8, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-master-manipulator/2015/11/05/6555c004-8401-11e5-9afb-0c971f713d0c\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-master-manipulator/2015/11/05/6555c004-8401-11e5-9afb-0c971f713d0c_story.html).

<sup>5</sup> Ibrahim Al-Marashi, “Ahmed Chalabi: The real victor of the Iraq War,” *Al-Jazeera*, November 4, 2015, accessed December 8, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/11/ahmed-chalabi-real-victor-iraq-war-151104065757581.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Steele, “Ahmed Chalabi Obituary,” *The Guardian*, November 4, 2015, accessed, December 8, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/04/ahmed-chalabi>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Marashi, “Ahmed Chalabi: The real victor of the Iraq War.”

What is lost in these pieces is the presence Chalabi had at the center of Middle East policymaking in the United States for nearly a decade as he used every means at his disposal to push for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. There is no mention of the times he testified before Congress on the issue of Iraq and Saddam Hussein; the legislative successes he achieved with his Washington allies; the numerous high profile interviews he gave to key outlets in the U.S. press; or his presence behind Laura Bush during the 2004 State of the Union speech. The obituaries mostly recount his career in vague or sweeping terms, ignoring the colorful and complex rise and fall of Ahmad Chalabi. He is remembered by some as a flawed hero, others as an insidious foreign trickster. In reality he was a figure who seized upon a heated and factionalized political climate in the United States in order to pursue his own goals, and whose actions helped to shape the current situation transpiring in Iraq.

During the seventies Chalabi accepted a teaching position at the American University of Beirut, leaving to run the lucrative and family owned Petra Bank in Jordan during the eighties. By his own account, Chalabi was all the while participating in anti-Ba<sup>c</sup>thist activities. He claims to have smuggled arms to the Kurds after completing his bachelor's degree, as well as quite spectacularly claiming to have broken up a Ba<sup>c</sup>thist cell in Chicago while pursuing his doctorate.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps these claims should be treated with a degree of skepticism as it seems strange that Chalabi shunned a privileged and secure

---

<sup>10</sup> David Rose, "Can Anybody Bring Order to this Chaos?" *Evening Standard*, April 10, 2003, accessed October 28, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/329583866?accountid=8555>.

lifestyle, dedicating himself instead to undermining the government of a country he knew only as a child.

Chalabi benefited from the United States' own mission to supplant Saddam Hussein from an early stage in the form of funding from the CIA to set up an Iraqi opposition group. However, not long after he was accused of misappropriating this U.S. aid while simultaneously breaking from its stated purpose and pursuing his own avenues of subversion aimed at toppling Saddam Hussein through a people's uprising. Chalabi attempted to force the United States to expand its mission in Iraq against its will, and lambasted it in the late 1990s for "abandoning" an ally. Both the CIA and State Department became his enemies, unwilling to do business with a man they could not trust or control. And yet at the same time Chalabi used his political connections in Washington to outflank his handlers and cultivate a pool of allies who shared his ideals. Ultimately, this allowed his supporters to pass legislation making regime change in Iraq U.S. law.

Ahmad Chalabi's relationships with prominent neoconservatives both in and around the George W. Bush administration are well known, as was their support for him as a de Gaulle-like figure for the "liberation" of Iraq. Given their common goal of ousting Saddam Hussein, it is the political ambitions of these men and their continued prominence in American public life that fuel the debate as to whether Chalabi was the manipulator or the manipulated. Chalabi aligned himself with those in Washington who sought to abandon the policy of containment that had been in place since the end of the first Gulf War for a more direct interventionist approach. This hawkish element sought a more active and aggressive U.S. foreign policy which would use military intervention in a

pivotal part of the Middle East to influence global political dynamics. Plans to overthrow Saddam Hussein, which had been in the making since 1991, were accelerated by the election of George W. Bush to the presidency and the outcry that followed the September 11, 2001 attacks. What followed was an environment in which both the public and elected officials were more receptive to armed intervention to combat terrorism. Sensing a chance to coax the United States into overthrowing a still belligerent Saddam Hussein, Chalabi intervened in the debate on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction to provide the "evidence" needed to justify war.

The real aims of Ahmad Chalabi did not become truly apparent until after he was situated in Iraq and he became less reliant on his American allies. His open disdain for the occupation made it very clear what he thought of the American presence in Iraq, despite the allegedly similar goals of the two. What Ahmad Chalabi was after, in fact, was not a democracy imposed by the United States, but an Iraq he could manipulate as he saw fit based upon his desire for power and influence. The events that transpired after the invasion of Iraq are more telling of who Ahmad Chalabi was than what he did while working Capitol Hill. Where some of his actions in the United States have been deemed to be manipulative, his actions in Iraq were exploitative and counterproductive. It is in Iraq that Chalabi often acted counter to U.S. objectives and sought to maximize his personal status at the expense of U.S. interests and the welfare of Iraq as a whole. Here was revealed a man whose true aims clashed greatly with the image of the reliable ally, as well as the natural leader of the new Iraq, put forth by neoconservatives in Washington. The policies and avenues that Chalabi pursued were ones aligned with his own agenda and vision for



how the political system of Iraq should function. Here his vision often appeared sectarian as well as anachronistic, and at times led him to adopt courses of action that were both dangerous and corrupt.

As the situation in Iraq continues to deteriorate, a review of Ahmad Chalabi's remarkable career and his often complex role in U.S. decision making process seems evermore appropriate. How did his experiences in Hashemite Iraq influence his quest to overthrow Saddam Hussein? What effect would his experiences between his childhood and role as an active opposition member have on his political career and ambitions? Once he began to seek the overthrow of Saddam Hussein after 1991, to what extent was Chalabi acting independently of the United States? How much support did he have in decision making circles in the United States? How far did Chalabi contribute to the decision to go to war in 2003? What was his role in the way Iraq developed after the invasion? Through leaked government documents, press coverage, independent studies and reports, and the secondary literature on the increasingly well-studied contemporary history of Iraq, this thesis attempts to answer these questions while mapping out the relationships, policies, and ambitions that drove Chalabi's spectacular and at times controversial career, giving particular attention to his role in the U.S. invasion and occupation of the country of his birth. However, it should be noted that this work merely examines the U.S.-Chalabi relationship as a small part of the greater picture of the invasion and occupation of Iraq, and is not meant to attribute all of the blame or controversy of this period to this particular relationship.

The aims set out above are addressed in four substantive chapters analyzed through an a-theoretical approach, each focusing on a different aspect and period of Ahmad Chalabi's life. The first chapter focuses on Hashemite Iraq, the Iraq Chalabi knew as a child and sought to restore after his return to Iraq as an adult. The wealth and power that the Chalabis commanded in Iraq was not easily forgotten by Ahmad, who attempted to restore this lost world in his quest to return to Iraq. Once in Iraq after 2003, he resorted to the same strategies of collaboration and patronage that had brought his family such success under Ottoman, British, and monarchic rule. The following chapter turns to Chalabi's early life as an Iraqi exile studying and working abroad. During this period Chalabi made connections that he benefited from in the future, as well as engaging in actions – in the course of the Petra Bank affair in Jordan in particular – that haunted him until his death. Third is a chapter focusing on Chalabi's complex relationship with the United States before the invasion of Iraq. It covers his activities from the founding of the Iraqi National Congress in 1991 until the eve of the U.S. invasion of 2003, exploring the actions and tactics Chalabi employed while advocating regime change in Iraq. The final chapter turns to his role after the invasion and his relationship with the U.S. occupation, closing with the Iraqi elections of 2010. This period has received little attention in the aftermath of Chalabi's death, although the available evidence – including the trove of information in WikiLeaks – proves it to be the most crucial and defining chapter of his remarkable career.

## CHAPTER II

### CLASS AND POLITICS IN HASHEMITE IRAQ

When Ahmad Chalabi returned to Baghdad in the spring of 2003, it was the first time he had returned to Iraq in forty-five years. As a result of the 1958 July coup, a then fourteen year old Ahmad Chalabi and his family emigrated from Iraq, beginning a decades long period of exile. However short the period of time Chalabi spent in Iraq before fleeing to London, it made a lasting impression on him, one he sought to resurrect. This is not surprising given the fact that the Chalabi family was one of the wealthiest families in Iraq in the decades leading up to the coup, and while enjoying an immense amount of political clout at the same time. The lavish lifestyle led by his family in Iraq is laid out full in a 2010 book written by his daughter, Tamara Chalabi, entitled, *Late for Tea at the Deer Palace: The Lost Dreams of My Iraqi Family*.<sup>11</sup> It recounts a family that enjoyed great economic prosperity, amassing a fortune of around USD 36 million by the time of the coup through both their companies and vast land holdings. This is in stark contrast to the roughly thirty Iraqi dinars, or USD 90, earned on average by Iraqi peasants per annum in the years after the Second World War.<sup>12</sup> They enjoyed the company and friendship of the

---

<sup>11</sup> Tamara Chalabi, *Late for Tea at the Deer Palace: The Lost Dreams of My Iraqi Family* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Adeed Daweesha, *Iraq: A Political History From Independence to Occupation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 151.

Iraqi royal family, Iraqi political heavy weights such as Nuri al-Sa'id, British High Commissioner Percy Cox, and British orientalist Gertrude Bell. The family interacted largely in the circles of the social and political elite, entertaining upper class Iraqis on their multiple estates attended to by servants and driving to parliament in Cadillacs. It is unlikely that as a child, Ahmad, the youngest Chalabi by almost ten years, was aware of the situation that a majority of Iraqis faced. As Tamara Chalabi notes, "There was little need for them [the children] to set foot outside the Deer Palace. Besides all the visitors and workers on hand to entertain them, there were many activities on the estate." So sheltered and removed from the rest of Iraqi society the family was, that Ahmad did not grasp the reality of their situation in London until he saw his father cooking for the first time in his life.<sup>13</sup> Iraq for the Chalabis was a country on the path to becoming one of the most important countries in the Middle East. A rising arts scene, greater Shi'i political participation, and buildings designed by world-renowned architects for them were the marks of a successful Iraq.<sup>14</sup> Yet this ignored the often brutal crackdowns on political dissent, the ingrained instability attested to by serial coups attempted by the army, a staggering frequency of cabinet changes, as well as Britain's exploitative and monopolistic relationship to Iraq's economy as a whole.

As a teenager, Ahmad Chalabi began a lifelong mission not just to rid Iraq of the rule of the Ba'ath Party, but also to reclaim the lost glory of his family. Yet the Iraq of Ahmad's childhood was little more than a mirage created by his narrow interaction with

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Bonin, *Arrows of the Night: Ahmad Chalabi's Long Journey to Triumph in Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 16.

<sup>14</sup> Chalabi, *Late for Tea at the Deer Palace*, 251.

the world outside his family's estates. While he may have remembered Iraq under Hashemite rule as a pluralistic land of prosperity, in fact it was ruled by a small landed elite with a rigid class structure. The system to which Ahmad Chalabi wished to return was one of rampant inequality and backdoor political dealings, the latter practices that he emulated upon returning to Iraq in 2003. It was an Iraq in which, when reflected upon, the Chalabi patriarch was "naturally among the delegation"<sup>15</sup> of individuals to greet Faisal I as he arrived in Baghdad for the first time as king of Iraq. The Iraq of his family's past, from which they benefited greatly, is one from which Ahmad Chalabi seemed unable to detach himself. In a January 2003 interview, he felt compelled to mention that the shirt he wore the day Iraqi troops came in search of his brother Rushdi, a government minister loyal to the monarchy, in the days after the 1958 July coup, was purchased from Harrods' in London.<sup>16</sup> Ahmad Chalabi sought to return Iraq to a place where his family could once again achieve great importance, where it would be able to reclaim what he deemed its proper status. Ironically enough, the campaign he launched to restore the idealized world of his childhood ultimately ended up tarnishing his own name and reputation, making even his post 2003 successes appear ephemeral and unimportant.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>16</sup> David Rose, "An Inconvenient Iraqi," *Vanity Fair*, January 2003, accessed September 18, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/201100645?accountid=8555>.

## A. Patronage in Early Iraq

A key institution in the forming of governments and cabinets during the Hashemite period was the cultivation and exploitation of an extensive network of patronage<sup>17</sup>. Many prominent Iraqis used the patron-client relationship as a way to boost influence among their individual communities in order to create a strong political base. A system such as this limited the ability of individuals within the power structure to defy mainstream political currents without suffering setbacks to their ambitions and prestige. Yet, if the individuals played within the system, the amount of clients and prestige they

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<sup>17</sup> In basic terms patronage can be defined as an exchange of resources between two parties, with one (patron) being hierarchically elevated above the other (client), “in a mutually beneficial way.” In the political context these resources are exchanged for support or solidarity within a government or movement, with the resources being political positions, funds, contracts, or appointments for the client party. By distributing political resources amongst its clients, a patron attempts to build a loyal base of like-minded individuals in order to achieve “organizational and governmental goals, such as entrenching party or politicians’ networks...or ensuring the effectiveness of (party) government by controlling the process of policy making and policy implementation.”

Specifically, in the U.S.-Chalabi context, this exchange takes place between to “elite” parties seeking to formulate new political norms and agendas. The United States government can obviously be considered elite given the fact that it is the ruling structure of a sovereign nation. Chalabi fits into the elite framework from a different perspective, in that the expectation was that once the Ba’th Party was overthrown Chalabi would assume a position within the governing institutions of Iraq. This point is further defined by the fact that Chalabi’s family had once been party of the elite class in Mandate and Hashemite Iraq, and Ahmad Chalabi sought to restore his family’s place in any new system of governance. By engaging in this relationship or partnership Chalabi had to an extent “agree to forgo some...autonomy in order to realize collective benefits.” In the case of this thesis, this system is important for framing the relationship between the United States and Ahmad Chalabi. Given the resources the United States held that could benefit Chalabi in his quest to overthrow Saddam Hussein, one can assign the role of “patron” to the former and “client” to the latter at certain points in the relationship. It will become apparent, however, in the U.S.-Chalabi case that as the nature of the relationship changes so do the expectations what resources or support “buys” either party, complicating matters as Chalabi seeks out new sources of support.; “Clientelism,” *SAGE International Encyclopedia of Political Science* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications), 2011, 282-286.; “Collaboration,” *SAGE International Encyclopedia of Political Science* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications), 2011, 298-299.

accumulated would potentially propel them higher in the governing structure, as their ability to command a network of clients enhanced their worth as political mobilizers.

According to David Pool's exhaustive study of Iraqi patronage systems of the period, the goal of an Iraqi politician was to become a "central patron", that is one who has cultivated a great number of clients and grants favors in exchange for prestige, return favors, and in some cases remuneration.<sup>18</sup> Most individuals on this track began as clients themselves, gaining access to parliament or the cabinet by a central patron due to their local power, socio-economic status, or relationship to other notable individuals. They garnered more government and domestic support through voting favorably on policies and lubricating advantageous deals, leases, contracts, and commissions. Being selected and appointed, and more importantly re-elected, was dependent on the level of cooperation put forth by a client. Ministers who acted against policy favorable to certain groups or individuals, and later parties, found themselves asked to resign or not included in the next cabinet or candidates' list after the inevitable government collapse. Pool also outlines the specially tailored benefits of being a client of the various ministers, as well as pitfalls of the system:

"The lack of co-ordination between Ministries resulted in the building up of political debts. A revenue remission for a political client or a commercial concession for a political ally were granted by the Ministry of Finance. The Minister of Defence [*sic.*] could offer release from conscription. The Minister of Education could offer a scholarship to study abroad. All could offer jobs in their respective Ministries. This exploitation of mutual favours brought mutual dependency between

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<sup>18</sup> David Pool, "The Politics of Patronage: Elites and Social Structure in Iraq" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1972), 140.

ministers, and facilitated the formation and disintegration of central factions.”<sup>19</sup>

Successful participation in the patron-client system seemed to be beneficial even when it failed. After resigning because of his failure to quell demonstrations protesting the signing of the Portsmouth Treaty, which extended British military influence and territorial rights in Iraq, Salih Jabr was awarded the post of foreign minister in the government of Muhammad al-Sadr, which was formed immediately after at the request of the regent °Abd al-Ilah. Such rewards were apparently not uncommon.<sup>20</sup> This system extended beyond parliament, cabinet ministers, or even the prime minister and directly into the Palace itself.

Regent °Abd al-Ilah is known to have cultivated a substantial client network of his own, and attempted on various occasions to use it to influence or intervene in government policy. One of °Abd al-Ilah’s clients, Arshad al-Umari, tried unsuccessfully to dilute Nuri al-Sa’id’s power in 1954. While Nuri was visiting France, °Abd al-Ilah had parliament dissolved and held new elections in which Nuri’s party and supporters lost the majority. However, enough opposition members loyal to Nuri, or at least his policies, retained seats in parliament to foil any meaningful legislation al-Umari wished to pass as prime minister. Realizing that the opposition had essentially stalled the government, the Regent made a personal plea to Nuri, offering another round of elections in order to entice him back into

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Silverfarb, *The Twilight of British Ascendancy in the Middle East* (London: MacMillan Press, 1986), 162.



the government.<sup>21</sup> As result Nuri assumed the premiership and his party returned to the majority, enacting a series of swift, anti-democratic “reforms” such as restricting press activities and banning political parties.<sup>22</sup>

Such a system served only to perpetuate the inequality amongst the various segments of Iraqi society. This, coupled with the seemingly chaotic system of governance, hindered the ability of the government to make any meaningful overtures to the vast majority of the populace. After all, fifty-nine cabinets rose and fell between 1920 and 1958<sup>23</sup>, painting a rather fickle and chaotic picture of governance during the Hashemite period. The possibility for reform was unlikely as the amount of pressure exerted on any given government to overhaul the system was minimal. Therefore, the lack of potential for reform lead to an increase in the reliance on demonstrations and violence as a means of pushing to reshape the political system.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Elliot, *Independent Iraq*, 29.

<sup>22</sup> Daweasha, *Iraq: A Political History From Independence to Occupation*, 111-12.

<sup>23</sup> Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq 1932-1958* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 370-372.

<sup>24</sup> Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 124.

## B. Economic Actors

Two major groups dominated the economy of Hashemite Iraq: the landed elite, or *mallāks*, and the urban merchant class.<sup>25</sup> The *mallāks* were comprised of Sunnis and Shiʿa, sheikhs and merchants, and urban and rural landlords who leased their lands to farmers producing predominantly crops of grains and dates. Both groups were positioned prominently in Iraqi society. The landed elite had built its power and prestige over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century seeing a vast increase in their powers and privileges under the Hashemite monarchy. This was due to the fact that they made up a large portion of the political base of many Iraqi politicians, in part because of their ability to mobilize support for various leaders and parties. Several favorable laws were passed during the Hashemite period strengthening the position of the *mallāks* and limiting their financial obligations.<sup>26</sup> The most notorious, and perhaps important, of these laws was the 1933 *Law Governing the*

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<sup>25</sup> For the purpose of this thesis I have chosen to focus predominantly on the merchant and *mallāk* categories to which the Chalabi family belonged, and not the entire elite power structure of Iraq prior to the July coup. A *mallāk*, in the most basic explanation, can be described as a landowner. Most *mallāks* worked small estates of roughly 50 dūnums, a little over 12 acres or 5 hectares, and possessed only 6.2 per cent of Iraq's total land (Batatu 55). However, amongst the *mallāks* there existed larger land holders, estimated at 1 per cent of the population, who controlled 55.1 per cent of Iraq's total land (Batatu 55). This group of wealthier *mallāks* was unified only by land holdings or politics, but there was generally no typical class background for *mallāks*. The Chalabis fell well within this 1 per cent, as by 1958 they possessed 108,810 dūnums (26,887 acres/10,881 hectares) of land in the Baghdad and Diyalah areas (Batatu 59). The definitions of the other social classes of Iraq, as laid out by Hana Batatu, do not fit the Chalabi schema. The Chalabi patriarch was not the head of a tribe and held no religious prestige, despite the administration of the al-Kadhimiyya shrine from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore they were not of the sheikhly class, though it was possible for sheikhs to be *mallāks*. Nor were they *sādah*, descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Being Arab urban merchants and landowners it is impossible for them to be Kurdish tribal leaders, so the title of *gha* does not apply.

<sup>26</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 105.

*Rights and Duties of Cultivators*. Under this law the farmers themselves, not the landowners, could be held responsible for the failure of a crop and punished with eviction.<sup>27</sup> Further, the *Cultivators Law* implemented a reduction in the amount money the *mallāks* owed the government, as well as restricting taxation to produce sold at the market.<sup>28</sup>

In 1933, land taxes yielded only 14 per cent of government income, down from 42 per cent in 1911.<sup>29</sup> Laws such as this, designed specifically to placate an already powerful group, further marginalized an already struggling peasant class and ultimately encouraged a mass urban migration as a means of escaping lifelong debt.<sup>30</sup> It was adherence to and acquiescence in the interests of the landed elite that served as the greatest roadblock to economic reform and progress during this period. Cross cutting political ties among the landlord class discouraged politicians from attempting radical agrarian reform in order to avoid alienating and angering the traditional landed elite. Nuri al-Sa'īd himself was bound to these groups, as it was said that he was hesitant to upset his political base and in fact encouraged legislation that added to their benefit.<sup>31</sup> These policies served to only harm Iraq, by both widening the gap in the class structure, as well as contributing to an already stagnant economy. As Tripp notes:

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 180.

<sup>28</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 105.

<sup>29</sup> Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 162.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>31</sup> Elliot, 'Independent Iraq', 16.

“...many of Iraq’s financial difficulties and profound social and economic problems could be laid at the door of its principle landowners. Determined to extend and reinforce their landholdings and revenues, the large landowners, whether rural shaikhs, state officials or urban merchants, had ensured that the state gave priority to their own interests, even when this was apparently at the expense of the state itself.”<sup>32</sup>

It was not until the renegotiation of an agreement with the Iraqi Petroleum Company that the Iraqi government saw a decrease in the dependence of agriculture and land tax as its main source of revenue. The shift away from agricultural revenue, which accounted for 3 per cent of government income after 1952,<sup>33</sup> by no means meant a decrease in the power or prestige of the landed class. In fact, portions of the money were allotted to infrastructure projects in which the *mallāks* were the primary beneficiaries.

Urban merchants operated both within and outside of the landed class, engaging in all sectors of the economy, from banking to land holdings, grain milling, construction, cloth, and many other areas. Many also held large rural estates and profited by leasing them to farmers or running them outright, thus straddling the division between *mallāk* and merchant. However, while the business interests of this group overlapped, they did not necessarily form a cohesive group. According to Batatu, the urban merchants could be divided by religion, class status, and their degree of compatibility with British economic interests.<sup>34</sup> Economic policies passed by the various cabinets were generally favorable to all merchants, looking again to enhance the wealth and prestige of the mercantile class

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<sup>32</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 82-83.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>34</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 275.

from which they were reliant upon for support. The combined industrial and agricultural power and wealth made the urban merchants an extremely powerful and influential segment of Iraqi society, one that demanded and forged a place in the power structure. The wealth and power of Shi'ci Arab merchants increased drastically after the flight of many of Iraq's Jews in the 1950s, as they folded many of the sectors previously dominated by Jewish merchants into their existing business enterprises.<sup>35</sup> And among this group, one prominent family of Shi'ci merchants and businessmen turned politicians, the Chalabis, left an indelible mark on the history of Iraq.

## C. The Chalabis

### 1. *Economic role*

The Chalabi family occupied spaces within the landed, mercantile, and political spectrums of Iraq, carving a place out of Iraqi society with which to make their mark. It is claimed that the family arrived in Iraq with “the army of Murad IV” in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and at some point during the Ottoman period was bestowed with the honorific title of *al-chalabi*,<sup>36</sup> an unusual honor for a Shi'ci family. They were later named as the administrators of al-Kadhimiyya, a Baghdad suburb containing a shrine of no small

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>36</sup> According to Marcel Erdal, the title *chalabi* comes from the Turkish *çelebi*, which “applied to members of the [Turkish] royal family, to spiritual personages in high positions and particularly to heads of religious orders, to famous authors and the like; sometimes it was used more generally, as ‘distinguished gentleman.’”; Marcel Erdal, “Early Turkish Names for the Muslim God, and the Title *Çelebi*,” *Asian and African Studies* 16 (1982): 407-416.

significance, until 1865.<sup>37</sup> Not only does al-Kadhimiyya contain the shrine which houses the remains of both the seventh and ninth Shi'ci imams, but it was also dominated by Shi'ci families.<sup>38</sup> Being the administrators of al-Kadhimiyya, the Chalabis were responsible for maintaining the shrine, as well as collecting local taxes. Though they were subject to the authority of the Ottoman *wali*, or governor, they enjoyed greater influence and power due to the fact that the *wali* acted largely outside the local community's inhabitants and customs. So while officially the *wali* was placed in charge of a province, his ability to command and mobilize the people was limited, which placed great importance on the local administrators such as the Chalabis. As administrators they were largely obedient and effective and "maintained excellent relations with the Ottoman government."<sup>39</sup> However, the family did not begin to show up on the map of Iraq's history until the mid- to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, under the hand of then patriarch Ali Chalabi. At this point, it appears that the family profited from their agricultural estate and tax farming<sup>40</sup>, but it was not until after the death of Ali, and the takeover of his affairs by his son 'Abd al-Hussein, that the family started its climb to real power and prosperity.

In the economic sphere, the Chalabi family operated on a number of different levels including agriculture, industry, and banking, and were described as having "stood at

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<sup>37</sup> Chalabi, *Late for Tea at the Deer Palace*, Xxxi.

<sup>38</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 18.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

the pinnacle”<sup>41</sup> of the aforementioned areas. They invested heavily in the al-Kadhimiyya-Baghdad Tramway, undoubtedly due to their long-standing presence in the shrine city and its potential monetary benefits. In addition to the family’s other lucrative business interests they managed to acquire the incredibly lucrative Latifiyya Estate from the British company Andrew Weir & Co. in 1954 through their status as the company’s principal agent. Andrew Weir & Co. held a monopoly on date exports in Iraq from 1939-1953 under an agreement signed by the Iraqi Date Board.<sup>42</sup> The acquisition of Latifiyya brought their total land holdings to approximately 90,000 acres.<sup>43</sup> Being in possession of such a large amount of arable land placed the family in a very strong socio-political position, especially considering that 80 per cent of the population of Iraq owned no land at all.<sup>44</sup> Their relationship with Andrew Weir & Co. proved to be especially rewarding securing not only numerous high-value business deals, but also establishing themselves as on the side of the British and the Hashemite royal family. Siding with the Monarchy and Mandatory power was as politically shrewd as it was economically lucrative given the elevated status of wealthy landowners. As an agent of Andrew Weir & Co., the Chalabis “enjoyed a strong position in the barley trade and a monopoly for packed date exports.”<sup>45</sup> In addition

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900-1950 A Political, Social, and Economic History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 368.; Joseph Sassoon, *Economic Policy in Iraq, 1932-1950* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 153.

<sup>43</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 57.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>45</sup> Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900-1950 A Political, Social, and Economic History*, 279.

to preferential contracts and dealings, the relationship also yielded a degree of financial security for the family. In response to increasing pro-Axis sentiments espoused by the al-Gaylani administration in the years preceding and during the Second World War, British officials sought a way to pressure the government into changing its stance, with one option being the imposition of restrictions on the export of dates. However, due to Andrew Weir & Co.'s financial interests, as well as their American allies being a large consumer of Iraq's exported dates, Britain opted not to interfere in the date trade.<sup>46</sup> The Chalabis also engaged in construction materials and flour milling through various entities such as Iraq Cement Co., United Cement Co., and Rafidain Milling and Trading Co.<sup>47</sup>, in all of which they held a considerable number of shares.<sup>48</sup> Such economic success positioned the family as an attractive prospect within the patronage system, as they came to occupy a prominent position in the Chamber of Commerce.<sup>49</sup> This was due to not only to their established history as a landed family, but also to their status as the former administrators of al-Kadhimiyya where their generous patronage afforded them great popularity amongst its inhabitants.

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<sup>46</sup> Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire In the Middle East*, 119.

<sup>47</sup> It has been alleged that the flour milling business had benefits of a greater political nature even after the 1958 July coup. According to Tamara Chalabi's *Late for Tea at the Dear Palace*, the family had previously bought some amount of grain from General Qasim's brother prior to the coup, who then continued to do business with the family even after their fall from grace. They then managed to parlay these dealings into a line of communication with Qasim and secure travel visas for those members of the family still remaining in Iraq.

<sup>48</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 276.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*



## ***2. Political positions***

As is often the case, economic and political power went hand-in-hand, allowing the Chalabi family to translate their economic success into political clout. The most prominent example of this was Hadi Chalabi granting loans to the Iraqi regent <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Ilah without remuneration, and his subsequent appointment as minister of public works and later vice president of the Senate.<sup>50</sup> The manipulation of the patronage system allowed the family to foster a relationship with the royal family from the very beginning of the monarchy. King Faisal I was even hosted at one of the family homes after his initial arrival in Iraq. It is unclear exactly how much real political power or influence the family was able to exert, but in March of 1930, <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Hussein Chalabi was appointed by King Faisal to Nuri Said's cabinet, demonstrating at least some amount of top-level accessibility.<sup>51</sup> Even outside of the family nucleus the Chalabi men were reaping the benefit of their well-known and respected family name. While it is unclear whether his appointment was a matter of political or economic dealings, in the mid-1950s Muhammad Ali Chalabi was placed as the head of the state-run Rafidain Bank founded in 1941.<sup>52</sup> It is here too that the Chalabis were benefited by the flight of Iraqi Jews, as the state-run Rafidain Bank soon became the "principal source of mercantile credit", replacing the Jewish lenders that Muslim borrowers had been dependent upon before.<sup>53</sup> Though the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>51</sup> Ali A. Allawi, *Faisal I of Iraq* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 517.

<sup>52</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 276.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 271.

extent to which the Chalabis benefited in a monetary sense from this shift is unknown, the new found importance of the bank granted the Chalabi family more status and prestige.

The Chalabis belonged to “an extremely narrow circle” of six merchant families that ministerial appointments were bestowed upon.<sup>54</sup> °Abd al-Hussein Chalabi began the line of political appointments for the family, being selected as Iraq’s first Minister of Education and occupied the post eight times from 1922-1935.<sup>55</sup> This appointment placed °Abd al-Hussein Chalabi nominally above Sati al-Husri, a noted theorist of early Arab nationalism who considered °Abd al-Hussein a “clown of Iraqi governments.”<sup>56</sup> Al-Husri, a staunch Pan-Arabist and key architect of Iraqi public education, held the post of Director of General Education which, unlike the Minister of Education, was a permanent position with actual responsibilities and powers. The Minister of Education post was filled and vacated by the prime minister as governments collapsed and were formed anew, yet al-Husri was immune from these changes as he was appointed at the behest of King Faysal himself.<sup>57</sup> °Abd al-Hussein Chalabi accepted this position despite the bans placed on participation put out by the mujtahids at the time, and was subsequently forbidden from entering the al-Kadhimiyya shrine for his defiance. This punishment was later nullified after the bans were rescinded, and in fact it appears that Hadi Chalabi came to enjoy some influence over the mullahs. Like most other of forms of influence, he was said to have

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>55</sup> Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 111.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Riva Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars, the Militarist Origins of Tyranny* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 69.

translated it into political support due to his ability to ease the occasional political tensions in al-Kadhimiyya.<sup>58</sup> However, there is no way to corroborate the validity of this information, as it is merely a personal claim made by Tamara Chalabi in the chronicle of her family's past. If true, however, this would indicate that the Chalabi family's political and class positions carried greater clout and influence than any religious titles or duties, a fact that was most likely not lost on the family. In fact, this would also suggest that religious figures would suspend their convictions given the opportunity to profit or advance in some fashion.

Before his death, <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Hussein had served in nine cabinets, in some of which he was the sole Shi<sup>c</sup>i representative.<sup>59</sup> Hadi Chalabi, his sons, and other family members went on to serve in all aspects of government under the Monarchy. Besides being elected as an MP into parliament, Hadi served as the first president of the Iraqi Stock Exchange and as vice president of the Senate. His sons went on to do equally well, serving in parliament, the Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Agriculture.<sup>60</sup> Other family members worked at the previously mentioned Rafidain Bank; another cousin, <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Jabbar Chalabi, a man described as having "unusual ability"<sup>61</sup>, was prominent in the Ministry of Supply and Development Board. Some of these appointments can be linked to both the

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<sup>58</sup> Chalabi, *Late for Tea at the Deer Palace*, 199.

<sup>59</sup> Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 121.

<sup>60</sup> Chalabi, *Late for Tea at the Deer Palace*, 136, 154.

<sup>61</sup> Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900-1950 A Political, Social, and Economic History*, 334.

purging of Arab nationalists after the al-Gaylani period<sup>62</sup>, the attempted watering down of Sunni power by the British, and the attempts of ʿAbd al-Ilah to restore greater power to the Palace. The Chalabi family’s amicable relationship with both the Palace and the British High Commission made them safe bets for staying within the prescribed system, essentially voting how they were told because their interests were aligned with those of the state.

An almost predictable dissolving and reforming of parliament and cabinets afforded the Chalabi family ample opportunities to maintain a lasting presence in the government. In 1958 alone various members of the Chalabi family held seventeen ministerial positions, including four appointments as deputies.<sup>63</sup> Thus, it appears that the Chalabi family was able to secure the confidence of the governing structure of Iraq. Undoubtedly, this was helped by their overall competence as political figures, their status as both clients and patrons, and their general compliance to the whims of the Palace.

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<sup>62</sup> Rashid al-Gaylani assumed the premiership in 1940, replacing Nuri al-Saʿid. Gaylani began pursuing positions opposed to the British and allying Iraq closer to Germany. After al-Gaylani was forced to resign his post, pro-Gaylani officers sent troops to occupy Baghdad in an attempt to restore him to power. This ultimately led to British military forces intervening to restore a pro-British government in Iraq, and a subsequent imposition of “authoritarian powers and regulations.”; Daweesha, *Iraq: A Political History From Independence to Occupation*, 98-100.

<sup>63</sup>Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 312-13.

## **D. Conclusion**

Hashemite rule in Iraq was one built upon a society marked by great inequality of wealth rooted in a system of landed elites. The segmented political, economic, and social structure, coupled with an unequal distribution of land, ultimately led to the downfall of the Hashemite monarchy due to the inability and unwillingness of its ruling oligarchy to enact meaningful reform. Preferential treatment and policies crossed ethno-religious lines, as Shi'i and Sunni, Arab and Kurd reaped the benefits of the patron-client relationship and a common class position. While patrons could grant favors to members of their political base, these generally did little or nothing to address the core issues and maladies afflicting those outside of the political and economic elite. Policies designed to enrich and placate traditional tribal and landed figures saw a reduction in the rights of the average Iraqi, and in the case of the *Cultivators Law*, placing them in the role of peasant to a powerful landlord. As illustrated above, the Chalabi family embodied the benefits that flowed to the top tier of this society and system, capitalizing on the unbalanced and highly personalized structure of governance and common class interest to gain a position at the very pinnacle of Hashemite Iraq – one that Ahmad Chalabi continued to yearn for throughout his long years in exile.

## CHAPTER III

### EARLY LIFE IN EXILE

The years between Chalabi's departure from Iraq and emergence into the public eye were marked by a series of events that set the stage for his role in the 2003 invasion. With his father, Ahmad flew to London in the immediate aftermath of the coup to begin a new life in exile. He was enrolled in prestigious boarding schools in England to finish his primary education, and went on to receive a bachelor's degree at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and a PhD in mathematics at the University of Chicago. Connections formed and actions made during this period opened inroads to the American political system and allowed Chalabi to cultivate allies in his quest to oust Saddam Hussein from power. His attendance at two prestigious universities in the 1960s put him into contact with one of the leading conservative thinkers, and part inspiration for the film *Dr. Strangelove*, of the time, Albert Wohlstetter.<sup>64</sup> But Chalabi did not greatly benefit from these connections until the 1990s when he began lobbying with earnest in Washington D.C. for regime change in Iraq. Thus Chalabi found himself connected to the fluid network of cold warriors who sought to re-formulate American foreign policy in a manner which exuded dominance in a post-Soviet world.

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<sup>64</sup> Richard Bonin, *Arrows of the Night: Ahmad Chalabi's Long Journey to Triumph in Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 136.

No less important for his future career was his tenure as the head of the family owned Petra Bank in Jordan during the late 1970s and 1980s. The collapse of the Bank under his leadership proved to be one of the lasting stains on his reputation and an enduring obstacle to attaining power and influence in a post-Ba<sup>c</sup>thist Iraq. Chalabi's relations with the Jordanian government and its people suffered due to the financial transgressions that he almost certainly committed while at the head of Petra Bank. An official inquiry into this episode in Jordan resulted in tens of millions of dollars in fines and a lengthy prison sentence (imposed in absentia after Chalabi fled the country). While Chalabi always maintained his innocence in the Petra affair, his actions before and after fleeing Jordan demonstrated just how far he was willing to go in his quest for the means to oust Saddam Hussein. During this period, and at other points, Chalabi undertook actions that suggest he believed that it was not necessary to adhere to the law in order to achieve his goals.

This period marked a formative time in Chalabi's life. Secondary sources indicate that even as an undergraduate Chalabi harbored feelings of animosity for the developments unfolding in Iraq. Though it is difficult to confirm, later in life Chalabi also claimed during this period that he had been engaged in ant-Ba<sup>c</sup>thist activities, most notably funneling arms to the Kurds. But whether those claims prove to be true or not, the relationships he formed while pursuing his studies, and later his tenure as the head of Petra Bank, proved pivotal in forming not only his ideology, but also setting up his future interactions with the United States.

## A. Early Life

In 1961, at age sixteen, Chalabi began his undergraduate studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Four years later he graduated with a Bachelor's of Science, and following a brief return to the Middle East to embark on the Hajj in 1965 he began to pursue a PhD in mathematics at the University of Chicago. Chalabi began his studies at the University of Chicago on October 4, 1965 and completed a masters degree a year later on December 17, 1966, then went on to receive a PhD in mathematics on August 30, 1969. During his time at the University of Chicago, Chalabi came under the tutelage of mathematician and nuclear strategist Albert Wohlstetter, who, by chance, oversaw the early careers of a number of leading neoconservatives and future Chalabi allies, including Paul Wolfowitz and Zalmay Khalilzad. It should be noted that although Chalabi and Wolfowitz shared the same mentor, there is no indication that the two ever met while attending the university. Coincidentally, although he did not study under Wohlstetter, another future associate of Chalabi, Chairman of the Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee Richard Perle, had dated Wohlstetter's daughter in high school.<sup>65</sup> Wolfowitz and Perle were later recruited by Wohlstetter to staff the Committee to Maintain a Prudent Defense Policy, a group formed to lobby congress to prevent a cut in funding for the antiballistic missile system.<sup>66</sup> It was with the help of these men that Chalabi was to push so earnestly for regime change in Iraq in the decades to come.

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<sup>65</sup> David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 278.

<sup>66</sup> James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), 32.



After graduating from the University of Chicago in 1969, Ahmad Chalabi obtained a teaching position at the American University of Beirut in the mathematics department. Chalabi spent only six years in Lebanon, though they were years that were beneficial for Ahmad and the Chalabi family as a whole. By this time the Chalabis had carved out a pleasant existence in Lebanon through both banking and marriage. One of Ahmad's brothers had founded the Middle East Banking Corporation (Mebco) which was patronized in large part by Shi'ci including members of the Lebanese political party Amal.<sup>67</sup> And, in 1972 Ahmad married Leila Osseiran, daughter of an important figure in the founding of modern Lebanon and Speaker of the Parliament, Adel Osseiran.

But perhaps the most prestigious connection made in Lebanon was that of Musa al-Sadr, the renowned Shi'ci theologian and founder of Amal. The Iranian born al-Sadr had spent numerous years studying in Najaf, Iraq before migrating to Lebanon in 1959.<sup>68</sup> During his time in Lebanon, al-Sadr worked to strengthen the struggling Shi'ci community and give it a greater political voice. His family in Iraq apparently held close ties with the Chalabis, and he was reportedly a "regular visitor" to the Chalabi compound after his arrival.<sup>69</sup> In fact, al-Sadr even officiated Ahmad's wedding and allegedly received a car

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<sup>67</sup> Aram Roston, *The Man Who Pushed America to War: The Extraordinary Life, Adventures, and Obsessions of Ahmad Chalabi* (New York: Nation Books, 2008), 62.

<sup>68</sup> Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 11.

<sup>69</sup> Tamara Chalabi, *Late for Tea at the Deer Palace: The Lost Dreams of My Iraqi Family* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 335.

from his brother Rushdi Chalabi.<sup>70</sup> Al-Sadr's continued contact was indeed a boon for the Chalabi family. Not only did their bank benefit from the deposits of Amal followers, but the family benefited from the prestige of the relationship. In his 1986 book about Musa al-Sadr, Fouad Ajami credits Ahmad Chalabi with teaching him "a good deal about Musa al-Sadr and the world of Shia Iraq."<sup>71</sup> This is not the only time Ahmad was used as a reference in a book about an al-Sadr. Chibli Mallat, a student of Ahmad's brother Muhammad who was a law professor at the Lebanese University, cited Ahmad in a footnote for his 1993 book about Musa al-Sadr's cousin and brother-in-law, Muhammad Baqer al-Sadr, *The Renewal of Islamic Law*.<sup>72</sup> Mallat later became an active opposition figure against Saddam Hussein. Musa al-Sadr vanished during a trip to Libya in 1978 while Ahmad was in Jordan running the newly formed Petra Bank, but his usefulness as a contact did not end with his disappearance. In the years following the invasion, Chalabi would use his family's ties with Musa al-Sadr as an inroad to a relationship with Iraqi cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 336.; Roston, *The Man Who Pushed America to War*, 25.

<sup>71</sup> Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon*, 10.

<sup>72</sup> Chibli Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law: Muhammad Baqer as-Sadr, Najaf and the Shi'i International* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

## **B. The Petra Bank Scandal**

After leaving his teaching position at the American University of Beirut, Chalabi travelled to Jordan to launch the family owned Petra Bank in 1977 on the invitation of Crown Prince Hassan bin Talal. The Chalabi family had a long history of banking with privately owned banks and the state run Rafidain Bank in Iraq. Within a few short years Petra Bank became Jordan's second largest bank, largely due to Ahmad's introduction of automated teller and credit card programs. But under Ahmad Petra Bank became mired in practices of questionable ethics and utility, eventually attracting unwanted attention from regulatory officials on two continents.

By the early 1980s the amount of foreign capital being injected into the Jordanian economy, on which it was highly dependent, began to decline. Foreign aid from oil rich Gulf States, as well as remittances from Jordanian workers, dwindled as global oil prices dropped, with Jordan receiving only half of what it had in the past by 1985.<sup>73</sup> This decline in funding included the yearly USD 1.25 billion allocated to Jordan during the 1978 Arab League summit, of which it was receiving only 45 per cent as of 1983.<sup>74</sup> To make up for the lack of capital, the government resorted to an extensive program of external borrowing, causing the national debt to rise to 164 per cent of Jordan's GDP by 1988, and

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<sup>73</sup> This had very serious implications for the Jordanian economy as it was reported in 1983 that grants from foreign governments accounted for 42 per cent of government revenues.; Samar Maziad, "Monetary Policy and the Central Bank in Jordan," Working Paper 09/191, International Monetary Fund (International Monetary Fund, 2009), 4.

<sup>74</sup> Philip Robins, *A History of Jordan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 166.

precipitating an eventual default in 1989.<sup>75</sup> The crisis was compounded by King Hussein's decision to withdraw from the West Bank in June of 1988, which was followed by a reduction in the flow of Palestinian funds sent to Jordan. In response to a 75 per cent reduction in the central bank's foreign capital reserves, which the government had been burning through since the mid-eighties, in the span of a single year, the governor of the Central Bank of Jordan, Muhammad Said Nabulsi, ordered measures aimed at stemming the outflow of foreign capital from Jordan.<sup>76</sup> One of these measures was a May 1989 order directing all Jordanian banks to deposit 35 per cent of their foreign currency reserves into the central bank.<sup>77</sup> All of the banks responded accordingly with the exception of one: Petra Bank.

Petra Bank's refusal to transfer a percentage of its foreign currency reserves to the Jordanian Central Bank coincided with banking troubles for the Chalabi family businesses as a whole. In Switzerland, a bank founded by one of Ahmad Chalabi's brothers, Mebco Geneva, was the target of an investigation for violating banking regulations which resulted in the revocation of its license in April 1989 and subsequent bankruptcy proceedings. Two Chalabi brothers were later charged and convicted, though their sentences were ultimately suspended. At the same time Mebco's Lebanese branch was also shuttered for "financial

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<sup>75</sup> Maziad, "Monetary Policy and the Central Bank in Jordan," 5.; Robins, *A History of Jordan*, 167. Imad H. el-Anis, *Jordan and the United States: The Political Economy of Trade and Economic Reform in the Middle East* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2011), 73.

<sup>76</sup> Maziad, "Monetary Policy and the Central Bank in Jordan," 6.

<sup>77</sup> Roston, *The Man Who Pushed America to War*, 53.

irregularities.”<sup>78</sup> In addition to the closing of Mebco another Switzerland based Chalabi business, investment firm Socofi, was caught up and liquidated as a result of Swiss investigations by 1990. Among other things, Socofi was found to have authorized USD 100 million in unpaid loans to various Chalabi family members and business arms.<sup>79</sup> Despite his best efforts, which included using USD 25 million of Petra Bank’s money to prop up Mebco, Ahmad Chalabi could not save either business.<sup>80</sup>

On August 3, 1989, the Jordanian government seized Petra Bank after its refusal to deposit USD 65 million with the central bank.<sup>81</sup> An audit commissioned by al-Nabulsi uncovered numerous instances of violating Jordanian banking regulations, false reporting of assets, and unethical lending practices. The audit, undertaken by Arthur Andersen and Co., revealed that “40 percent of the bank’s loans and commitments were ‘non-performing,’ or not paid back...Fourteen percent of the bank’s assets, or about \$130 million...were dubious loans to, or commitments from...the Chalabi family network, who had a high rate of default on them.”<sup>82</sup> Many of the loans flowed between Petra and the aforementioned Mebco and Socofi, and many allegedly went to the same Crown Prince

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<sup>78</sup> Robert Block, “Inside Failed Bank Run by Man U.S. Backs for Key Role in Iraq,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 2003.

<sup>79</sup> Christopher Dickey and Michael Hosenball, “Banker, Schmooser, Spy,” *Newsweek*, May 12, 2003.

<sup>80</sup> Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 37-38.

<sup>81</sup> Block, “Inside Failed Bank Run by Man U.S. Backs for Key Role in Iraq.”

<sup>82</sup> John Dizard, “The Implosion of Chalabi’s Petra Bank,” *Salon*, May 5, 2004.

Hassan bin Talal who invited the Chalabis to Jordan in the first place.<sup>83</sup> In doing so Ahmad Chalabi engaged in the same practice that his family had employed in Iraq: extending loans to members of the Hashemite monarchy not to be repaid. It can be argued that the money was well spent, because it was reported that when Chalabi fled to Syria to avoid being arrested and tried, it was a nephew of King Hussein, or even Crown Prince Hassan himself, who drove him to the border.<sup>84</sup>

In addition to the questionable transfer of money amongst the Chalabi businesses, USD 158 million in Petra Bank's capital deposits were reported missing while the bank had been falsely reporting its assets as USD 200 million, and shareholder equity was valued at a negative USD 268 million.<sup>85</sup> However, disappearing funds were only part of the problem, as it was reported that Petra Bank employees were flying millions of dollars worth of checks to be deposited at Petra's American office, Petra Banking Corporation International, to skirt Jordanian regulations.<sup>86</sup> Not only that, but Petra Bank consistently lent at rates over 90 per cent of deposits, 20 per cent more than the law allowed.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Dickey and Hosenball, "Banker, Schmoover, Spy."

<sup>84</sup> Robert Dreyfus, "Tinker, Banker, NeoCon, Spy: Ahmed Chalabi's long and winding road from (and to?) Baghdad," *The American Prospect*, November 18, 2002.; Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 40-41.

<sup>85</sup> Block, "Inside Failed Bank Run by Man U.S. Backs for Key Role in Iraq.>"; David Leigh and Brian Whitaker, "Financial scandal claims hang over leader in waiting," *The Guardian*, April 14, 2003.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

In the end a trial under the State Security Court charged Chalabi on seventy-two counts ranging from fraud, embezzlement, breach of trust, currency speculation, and more, and convicted him of forty-eight. He was sentenced to a twenty-two year prison term and ordered to repay the USD 30 million he is said to have embezzled. Throughout the ordeal Chalabi maintained his conviction was politically motivated, a result of his subversive activities against Saddam Hussein, with whom Jordan had become a critical trading partner. But according to Muhammad al-Nabulsi at the time, “all allegations of financial impropriety that went to court were prosecuted in military courts” due to the system of martial law that had been in place for the past twenty-two years.<sup>88</sup> Petra Bank was no exception. Even if Petra Bank was targeted in Jordan because of Chalabi’s political actions, the results of the Swiss investigations against Mebco and Socofi, as well as the evidence uncovered by Arthur Andersen and Co.’s external audit, are hard to refute. As a result of the collapse of Petra Bank, the already struggling Jordanian government was forced to pay out an estimated USD 500 million, or 10 per cent of Jordan’s GDP, to creditors and depositors.<sup>89</sup> The stain of the conviction continued to haunt Chalabi well after 2003 and had repercussions on his ability to navigate the Iraqi political landscape successfully. However, it was a telling sign of his readiness to bend the rules that he turned down two royal pardons after coming to power in Baghdad – ostensibly on the grounds that the whole Petra Bank inquiry had been unconstitutional.

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<sup>88</sup> Jeremy Scott-Joynt, “Chalabi’s chequered finances,” *BBC*, April 17, 2003.

<sup>89</sup> Dickey and Hosenball, “Banker, Schmooser, Spy.”

### **C. Conclusion**

The Petra Bank affair provided insight into the leadership style of Ahmad Chalabi. He engaged in practices similar to those his family had employed in Hashemite Iraq thirty years before Petra's closure. In an attempt to garner favor and prestige, Chalabi extended loans to at least one member of the Jordanian royal family and numerous government officials with no intention of collecting. The parallels are quite clear regarding the loans which his father made to the regent, 'Abd al-Ilah. Chalabi's decision to engage in such practices showed his willingness to mix business and politics, as well his belief in the possibility of buying political favor and profitable relationships with influential allies. In mitigation it may be that his actions during the Petra Bank affair were a calculated risk undertaken to prevent backlash over his anti-Ba'athist activities in Jordan. Chalabi operated under the notion that he could use generous cash infusions to his influential allies and shield himself from any political repercussions.

A less charitable interpretation would maintain that Ahmad Chalabi and his brothers treated the financial assets of Petra Bank, Mebco, and Socofi as family coffers to enrich themselves and expand their businesses. It is hard to ignore what appears to be a lack of respect or appreciation for working within the system and the rule of law, and for an apparent belief that the appropriate course of action was to disregard the rules. By making such cavalier use of the savings of Petra Bank's depositors, Chalabi put his own interests ahead of those of the people whom the bank was supposed to serve. This fiscal irresponsibility surfaced again in the INC's use of U.S. taxpayer money allocated for the task of undermining the regime of Saddam Hussein in the 1990s.



## CHAPTER IV

### CHALABI AND THE U.S.: 1991-2002

The years following the first Gulf War saw the U.S. pursuing a policy known as “dual containment” in the Persian Gulf. In an attempt to avoid future destabilizing conflicts that could threaten its new found primacy in the Middle East, the U.S. sought to isolate both Iraq and Iran, two of the region’s most recalcitrant members. Dual containment was viewed as placing a “straight jacket” around the two countries, meaning that their military and economic programs were to be restricted until either the regimes changed or altered their belligerent behavior.<sup>90</sup> For Iraq this meant a whole spectrum of economic sanctions imposed both unilaterally by the United States as well as in conjunction with the United Nations. Most critically, sanctions were placed on Iraqi oil exports. Ultimately it was recognized that two outcomes were possible from this strategy: either Iraq’s economy would be crippled, thereby limiting Saddam Hussein’s ability to threaten Iraq’s neighbors, or conditions would become so dire within Iraq that they would foment internal regime change.

It should be noted, however, that the strategy of dual containment was not meant to be a permanent or even long term solution. As time wore on both international and

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<sup>90</sup> Richard W. Murphy, *Differentiated Containment* (Washington, D.C.: Council on Foreign Relations, July 1, 1997), accessed November 20, 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/differentiated-containment/p122>.

domestic support for the containment strategy eroded. The Clinton administration faced criticism as the situation of Iraqi civilians deteriorated and the U.S. was accused of having reneged on its security obligations, such as protecting Kurdistan from a 1996 Iraqi incursion. The strategy's effectiveness was further called into question as it appeared, incorrectly, to fail to discourage Saddam Hussein's push to develop weapons of mass destruction. Increasingly stern warnings to Iraq at the U.N. and periodic U.S. missile strikes did little to assuage critics of dual containment who viewed direct military intervention as the only solution to the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. It was these individuals who viewed President H.W. Bush's refusal to depose Saddam Hussein at the end of the first Gulf War as a grave and feckless error, and regarded Clinton's Iraq policy as equally ineffective and dovish. Their increasing influence in policy circles in Washington would set the stage for a reorientation of U.S. policy that would include Ahmad Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress.

This march to war came at the expense of George H.W. Bush's vision of a greater role for the U.N. in international peacekeeping, often referred to as the "New World Order." By applying the authority of the Security Council, multilateral interventions could be given legitimacy, thereby making it easier – in theory – for increased engagement with, and protection of, global interests. Yet as George W. Bush ascended to the presidency, and his administration pushed increasingly for intervention in Iraq, the U.S. ultimately deviated from the path of multilateralism, pursuing its goals despite a lack of support even from allies on the Security Council.

It was in this political climate that Chalabi first emerged as a player in the U.S.’ attempt to keep Saddam Hussein in check. Chalabi’s plan had shifted after his experience with the CIA from one of cooperation to a plan of mobilization. During this period Chalabi’s tactics shifted to not only lay the legal framework for U.S. intervention in Iraq, but also a glorified public relations campaign aimed at reminding the American public of the situation in Iraq, and that there were Iraqi opposition groups eager for support. Though the degree to which all of those groups were unified, coherent, or competent he never addressed. But by engaging both the public and halls of government, Chalabi hoped to entice the U.S. to, if not intervene directly, then supply the INC with the necessary aid to act out its own plans.

Yet Chalabi, like his neoconservative allies in Washington, would prove to be a staunch critic of dual containment. Any solution where Saddam Hussein or the Ba<sup>c</sup>thists retained power in Iraq was not acceptable for Ahmad Chalabi. His vision of a society free of Ba<sup>c</sup>thist rule could only be achieved in an Iraq devoid of the political forces that had dominated it over the past couple of decades. Here he would put forth his own plan, in both the press and the inner circles of Washington D.C., of how regime change in Iraq and regional stability could be achieved. As Chalabi’s prominence on the American political landscape grew, so did the momentum behind the push to end the policy of dual containment in order to pursue a more direct solution to the Ba<sup>c</sup>thist regime in Iraq.

Neoconservatives in Washington saw in Chalabi an ally who shared their vision for Iraq and opposed what they regarded as a defunct policy tool adhered to by President Clinton, who they viewed as too soft and unwilling to confront Saddam Hussein. This lead

to a policy of funding opposition groups to actively undermine Saddam Hussein, a strategy from which Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress benefited greatly. American politicians would seek to pass legislation aimed at providing opposition groups with adequate resources and official U.S. support to overthrow Saddam Hussein in an attempt to pressure the Clinton administration into taking a more proactive approach. Yet despite all the political maneuvering and Chalabi's own untiring advocacy of regime change, it would take an unrelated threat – by the Afghanistan based Osama bin Laden – to finally push the U.S. to seriously consider armed intervention in Iraq.

## **A. Courting Chalabi**

### **1. *An Emerging Profile***

In the early stages of his quest to bring about regime change in Iraq, Ahmad Chalabi recognized the important role the press could play in influencing American public opinion on foreign policy matters. From 1991 to 2010, he would utilize the media in order to garner support and exert pressure for intervention in Iraq. This was accomplished not only through a network of friendships and professional relationships forged with prominent journalists and policy makers, but also through the submission of opinion pieces in numerous respected newspapers. These pieces can be grouped into three distinct periods: February-April 1991, November 1997-February 2003, and May 2003-March 2010, each of which will be visited in the chapters that follow. During each period the goal and method of each set of opinion pieces changes in respect to how the U.S. political discourse

developed in regard to Iraq. But, overall, the concerted objective of the opinion pieces was to move the American public and governing administration in favor of regime change.

The first set of Chalabi-authored opinion pieces spans from February 1991 to April 1991, in the immediate aftermath of the first Gulf War. All were penned prior to U.S. initiated contact with Chalabi, ceasing after he was reportedly contacted by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in London in May 1991.<sup>91</sup> These four pieces served as the first attempt at convincing the United States to support an popular uprising against Saddam Hussein.<sup>92</sup> This was the scenario Chalabi became known for championing, counter to the CIA's favored officers' coup scenario in which a general close to Saddam Hussein would take his place and maintain stability in Iraq. Chalabi's articles promulgated the image of an Iraq that is ripe for democratic change. According to the pieces, democratic freedom is what all Iraqis were yearning for and would flourish just given the requisite support needed to rid Iraq of Saddam Hussein. The publishing of Chalabi's first op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* also marked the beginning of Chalabi drawing upon the influence

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<sup>91</sup> Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Report on the Use by the Intelligence Community of Information Provided by the Iraqi National Congress*, 6.; Roston, *The Man Who Pushed America to War*, 6.

<sup>92</sup> Ahmad Chalabi, "A Democratic Future for Iraq," *Wall Street Journal*, February 27, 1991.; Ahmad Chalabi, "Democracy for Iraq," *The Washington Post*, March 12, 1991, A21.; Ahmad Chalabi, "The tragedy of Iraq's other battle," *The Observer*, February 24, 1991.; Ahmad Chalabi, "What the Iraqi Resistance Wants," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 8, 1991.

and aid of his conservative allies. By Chalabi's own admission it was Albert Wohlstetter, his former mentor at the University of Chicago, who helped him get the op-ed published.<sup>93</sup>

All four pieces cite various reasons that Western governments should overtly support Iraqi calls for democratic reform due to years of international support for Saddam Hussein, including the "assistance of all five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council." Chalabi cites the transfer of conventional and chemical weapons to Saddam Hussein, an increase in U.S. and British "credits" to Iraq after the chemical strikes on the Kurds, Western business interests in Iraq, and the U.S. supplied "largest agricultural credits programme extended to any nation in the world" prior to the first Gulf War as reasons why Western governments have a responsibility to act – "especially" the United States. The United States is named explicitly in these pieces for a number of reasons: first, many of the items listed above resulted from actions of the U.S. government; second, during the latter part of this period the Iraqi people were in fact revolting with the apparent encouragement of President George H.W. Bush; third, not only does the U.S. have the economic strength and capacity to assist the Iraqis, but according to Chalabi, "only the U.S. has the military and political presence" to mobilize international support in order to usher democracy into Iraq. Outside of listing all the failures and questionable decisions of the United States in supporting Saddam Hussein, Chalabi also attempts to point out American dissatisfaction at the current situation. He points to an "outraged public opinion", specifically using the word "intervention" to describe the desires of the

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<sup>93</sup> Aram Roston, *The Man Who Pushed America to War: The Extraordinary Life, Adventures, and Obsessions of Ahmad Chalabi* (New York: Nation Books, 2008), 69.

American public and a political debate “covered by the fig leaf of noninterference.” These pieces were specifically designed for an American audience, and, unlike opinion pieces published running up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, exclusively published in American newspapers.

But more than trying to convince the U.S. to support removing Saddam Hussein, Chalabi pushed for the support of a people’s uprising, and not the officers’ coup envisioned by most government officials. At the time American officials supported the notion of replacing Saddam Hussein with what was later referred to as “Saddam lite,”<sup>94</sup> a more Western friendly version of Saddam Hussein that would still keep Iran in check and maintain stability inside Iraq. This is explicitly noted by Chalabi in both the March 12, 1991 and April 8, 1991 pieces, while also acknowledging the possibility of it in the February 27, 1991 piece. Here too, words are carefully chosen to illustrate the perceived ambivalence of the West toward the suffering of the Iraqi people. According to the March 12, 1991 piece, the U.S. “is waiting for Saddam Hussein to butcher the insurgents in the hope that he can be overthrown by a suitable officer.” Chalabi also attempts to dissuade the perusal of this option by claiming that whichever general may succeed Saddam Hussein “will find himself unable to sustain himself in power over the wasteland that Iraq will be.”<sup>95</sup> So, in order to avoid “another cycle of escalating repression” the West, and the U.S. specifically, is urged to intervene on behalf of the rebelling Iraqis.

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<sup>94</sup> Nicholas D. Kristof, “Bait and Switch,” *The New York Times*, October 18, 2002. <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/docview/92185141/fulltextPDF?accountid=8555>.

<sup>95</sup> Ahmad Chalabi, “A Democratic Future for Iraq.”

While the February 24, 1991 and April 8, 1991 opinion pieces serve more to address the justification for direct foreign intervention in Iraq, the February 27, 1991 and March 12, 1991 pieces serve more as an explanation for why conditions inside Iraq are suitable for democratic reform. In both, numerous reasons are given for why Iraq's population makeup will aid and support a constitutional democracy. The February piece notes "the diversity of the society and the multiplicity of ethnic and religious groups, which would help maintain and protect a democratic government through natural checks and balances." This was echoed almost verbatim in the March piece. Such a diverse population is said to ensure that every community is able to participate equally amongst its peers. It is stated that the argument about "prospects of chaos and disintegration" along confessional or communal lines which the West uses to absolve itself from responsibility for removing Saddam Hussein as having "long been in tatters." The ability of such a diverse population to unite and compromise in the name of democracy and freedom is further highlighted when discussing the then current form of the Iraqi opposition. The opposition, presented as being comprised of "Islamicist, Kurdish nationalist, democratic, Communist and Arab nationalist" groups, is noted as having issued a manifesto on December 27, 1990, declaring the willingness of all groups to relegate their ideologies as secondary to the human and individual rights of Iraqis once free elections had been instituted. Under the opposition, a constitutional parliamentary democracy would be set up through a provisional government and the "power of the ballot box." Within this newly freed and unified Iraq a "large and well-educated middle class" would serve as the backbone of democracy.



These opinion pieces attempted to allay concerns about the compatibility of Islam with democracy as well, as Saddam Hussein had long been Washington's check to the power of the Ayatollahs in Tehran. Here, in two separate instances, Chalabi credits Shi'i religious institutions and scholars as being the architects of "modern parliamentary constitutional government in Islam" in the early years of the twentieth century. Here he recognizes the wariness of current and former administrations at expanding Shi'i participation in the region, given past interactions with the Islamic Republic of Iran. But despite coming from a family which was once designated administrators of the al-Kadhimiyya shrine in Baghdad, Ahmad Chalabi's adult life was largely devoid of any meaningful personal demonstration or practice of religion, with the exception of making the *Hajj* with his father in 1965. In fact, after the 2003 invasion he was almost exclusively identified as a secular Shi'i politician. Chalabi instead seemed to view his own Shi'i heritage as more of a cultural identity and political tool than as a spiritual practice. He had a keen grasp on what the Shi'i majority in Iraq could mean if the Ba'athist regime in Iraq ever fell, as well as what the influence of a Shi'i power like Iran could afford him. As he would demonstrate in the future, he would not shy away from attempting to capitalize on his Shi'i heritage in order to secure his position in a post-invasion Iraq.

## ***2. The Iraqi National Congress***

It was reported that after a long and frustrating search, a member of the Central Intelligence Agency contacted Ahmad Chalabi in London in May 1991. While he was still

the head of Petra Bank in the eighties, a CIA officer had apparently contacted Chalabi and arranged a face-to-face meeting, which caused his name to appear in CIA records as they searched for someone to organize the Iraqi opposition.<sup>96</sup> Prior to Chalabi's recruitment in 1991, the CIA had been tasked by President George H.W. Bush with launching subversive actions with the intent of weakening Saddam Hussein. The CIA recognized the value of Chalabi's conviction in Jordan as an asset that would aid in the masking of foreign funding, as it could be reasonably claimed that the large amounts of money required for such a venture came from the funds that Chalabi had embezzled from Petra Bank.<sup>97</sup> For multiple reasons, policy actors in Washington felt that it could not be known that the United States government was actively seeking to topple the Ba<sup>c</sup>thist regime in Iraq. They needed an individual that could be seen as acting independently from any outside influence, especially that of the United States. Thus, the CIA created the umbrella opposition group that was named the Iraqi National Congress (INC).

It should be noted however, that there was entrenched hostility to President Bush's directive, as well as the continuing campaign to overthrow the Ba<sup>c</sup>thist regime in Iraq, within the CIA. Not only did the agency have its own preferred plan for deposing Saddam Hussein, but many in the agency also viewed the directive as mere political theater by Bush in response to the criticism he was receiving for not backing the anti-Hussein uprisings at the end of the first Gulf War. Yet these misgivings did not stop the CIA from

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<sup>96</sup> Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Report on the Use by the Intelligence Community of Information Provided by the Iraqi National Congress*, 6.; Roston, *The Man Who Pushed America to War*, 32.

<sup>97</sup> Richard Bonin, *Arrows of the Night: Ahmad Chalabi's Long Journey to Triumph in Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 63.

carrying out the Presidential order, and they proceeded to pay Rendon Group, a Washington D.C. based public relations firm, to construct and manage the image of the Iraqi National Congress.<sup>98</sup>

The first major event organized by the Iraqi National Congress was the June 17, 1992 Vienna Conference, in which “More than 200 independent Iraqi opposition leaders”<sup>99</sup> were brought together to formally announce their opposition to the government of Iraq. And though the organization of the conference was placed largely in Chalabi’s hands, preparations only began at the insistence of the CIA. It was at the conference that one of Chalabi’s first CIA handlers began to notice potentially problematic characteristics of the CIA’s new client. During the conference he was seen playing members of the opposition off one another in order to act as an intermediary amongst the parties and solidify his stature as the key player.<sup>100</sup> Shortly after the Vienna Conference, Chalabi organized another meeting in October of 1992 in Salahudin, Iraq, a town under Kurdish control protected by the no-fly zone. While with essentially the same purpose and format as the previous gathering, the Salahudin Conference had one key advantage over the Vienna Conference from Chalabi’s perspective: it was out of reach of the CIA. It has been alleged that Chalabi was aware of the hesitance of the CIA to permanently station case officers in Iraq for prolonged periods of time, so he hosted the second opposition conference in Iraqi

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<sup>98</sup> W. Patrick Land, “Drinking the Kool Aid,” *Mid East Policy* 11:2 (2004): 43.; Michael J. Barker, “Democracy or polyarchy? US-funded media developments in Afghanistan and Iraq post 9/11,” *Media, Culture & Society* 30:1 (2008): 121.

<sup>99</sup> Jonathan Randal, “Iraqi Foes of Saddam Seek Unity,” *The Washington Post*, June 18, 1992, A26A.

<sup>100</sup> Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 76.

Kurdistan before relocating INC operations to Salahudin permanently.<sup>101</sup> In doing so he essentially freed himself and the INC from unfettered CIA monitoring and management as he pursued his own agenda in Iraq. Although the official mission of the INC was to launch a media campaign to discredit and weaken Saddam Hussein, Ahmad Chalabi had different plans for the organization.

### **3. Kurdistan**

Following the failed 1991 uprisings, the Kurdish region of Iraq entered a period of internal fighting and tensions. In April 1991, the Coalition had announced the establishment of a no-fly zone north of the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel, restricting the flight of Iraqi military planes. By October, following violent reprisals against the Kurds for their military advances against the government in Baghdad, a ceasefire was established, effectively creating a border roughly following the lines of the region of Kurdistan as understood in 1974.<sup>102</sup> That same month Kurdish leaders Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Massoud Barzani of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), entered into negotiations with Baghdad for increased autonomy of the Kurdish region. However these negotiations quickly collapsed, beginning a near total economic blockade of Kurdistan that would last for five years. With economic tensions proving to be too strong, cooperation between Talabani and Barzani broke down and conflict escalated in December

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 78-9.

<sup>102</sup> Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 254.

1993. A tentative U.S. brokered ceasefire took effect in April 1995, but fighting would resume in the summer of 1996, with the KDP seeking support in Turkey, and the PUK seeking support in Iran.

The fragile alliance between the two parties with the strongest military capabilities participating in the INC deteriorated even further when in August 1996 the KDP enlisted the aid of Baghdad and Iraqi troops entered Kurdistan, allowing the KDP to capture the de-facto PUK capital, Erbil. Unable to maintain peace between the two Kurdish factions, the INC's ability to act as a credible military threat to Saddam Hussein was seriously diminished, as were Chalabi's claims to being a capable and unifying opposition leader. By October, the U.S. had orchestrated another ceasefire, only to see it broken by March 1997. Finally, in September 1998, the U.S. managed to bring the two parties together to form what would be a lasting ceasefire and power-sharing pact, named the Washington Agreement. As the U.S. looked to expand its program of subversion in Iraq, the KDP and PUK became eligible for funds allocated for the process. However, in order not to provoke a response from Saddam Hussein both parties either publically rejected the aid or offered tepid responses.<sup>103</sup> The funding of dissident groups in northern Iraq was also paired with an expansion of the size no-fly zone, with an added provision banning armored vehicles from crossing its boundary.

The presence of U.S. government employees in Kurdistan was risky given the prolonged fighting between Kurdish factions and the ubiquitous presence of Saddam Hussein's mukhabarat agents. This gave Ahmad Chalabi the space to push the INC in

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<sup>103</sup> David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 391.

directions that he, rather than his handlers in Washington, favored. With the protection of the U.S. enforced no-fly zone, Chalabi sought to use the safety of air cover to set up a government in exile, one to which defectors from the Ba<sup>c</sup>th Party could flee to safety. The goal was for the exile government to organize a parliamentary democracy, realize a fully independent Kurdistan, and bring Saddam Hussein to justice. Yet despite clear opposition of the INC's main source of funds and support, the CIA, Chalabi went about establishing the groundwork for this government in exile with relative impunity.

Utilizing the INC's budget of USD 340,000 per month, Chalabi set up headquarters for the Iraqi National Congress in Salahudin, Iraq. This included living and working quarters, salaries, a radio station that was supposed to broadcast into Baghdad, a print works for distributing a dissident newspaper in Baghdad, and eventually setting up an INC militia and intelligence service. All of this went against the CIA envisioned operation, with the exception of the radio station and newspaper. While the CIA controlled the funding to the INC, there was little willingness to cut off funds to the organization. This was due to conflicting opinions in the CIA about the INC, as well as the fact that though the INC had become a nuisance there was no concrete reason to terminate the operation.

The radio station established for the INC, Radio Hurriyeh, was actually set up in London prior to the move to Kurdistan through a Chalabi owned, yet CIA funded, front company called the Iraqi Broadcasting Company. Once set up inside Kurdistan, Radio Hurriyeh broadcast messages into Baghdad with the intent to sow dissent amongst the general population and the Iraqi armed forces. However, upon later inspection of the radio

station's broadcasting abilities, the CIA found that the station was little more than words on paper. Not only was the equipment completely inadequate for the task and in poor condition, but the INC was using the wrong broadcast signal for the distance to Baghdad (they were broadcasting on a FM instead of AM frequency) and the broadcasts themselves were largely in Kurdish instead of Arabic.<sup>104</sup> Similar conditions were found in regard to the newspaper that was supposed to be distributed covertly by the INC in Baghdad. A CIA officer who went to inspect the operation in Kurdistan reported that "it had been eight months since the last newspaper was printed", and in Baghdad they could not locate a copy of the paper that "was supposed to produce five thousand copies every second day."<sup>105</sup>

While the INC shifted its mission from propaganda machine and opposition umbrella to active dissident group, Chalabi began to push for something he had outlined in his 1991 opinion pieces: a popular uprising. Though the uprising he envisioned after setting up operations in Kurdistan was not exactly how he had imagined it years earlier. Now, with the INC militia and the forces of the Barzani and Talabani families he envisioned an attack on Iraqi positions that would ultimately lead to the armed forces rising up and turning against Saddam Hussein. This was an extremely unpopular plan in both the CIA and United States government in general. Not only were government officials hesitant to back a campaign that would undoubtedly result in massive property damage and civilian casualties, they were not eager to encourage an operation into which the U.S. may inevitably be forced to take part. It has been said that this last consideration

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<sup>104</sup> Roston, *The Man Who Pushed America to War*, 117.

<sup>105</sup> Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 109.

was something that Chalabi was relying on. By instigating a conflict which Saddam Hussein would be forced to retaliate against, Chalabi hoped to draw the U.S. into the conflict to defend its chosen allies in northern Iraq.<sup>106</sup>

The idea of an INC-lead uprising was unpopular for another, previously stated, reason: it clashed with the CIA's own plan, which envisaged what was known as a "silver bullet" coup. In the CIA's preferred operation for deposing Saddam Hussein, the CIA would court softer, more Western friendly members of his inner circle who had an interest in seeing him removed from power. By pursuing this avenue of regime change the CIA could ensure that a strong government would remain in place in order to curtail Iranian influence and maintain the geopolitical status quo. The CIA attempted such an operation in 1996 with the help of former Iraqi general Muhammad al-Shahwani and an Iraqi opposition group headed by Ahmad Chalabi's cousin, Ayad Allawi, the Iraqi National Accord (INA); however, the Iraqi intelligence service managed to infiltrate and thwart the attempted coup.<sup>107</sup> At the time it was incorrectly assumed by many in the CIA that Chalabi had tipped off the mukhabarat in order to keep his own plans viable, fueling growing

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<sup>106</sup> *Peter Jennings Reporting*, "Unfinished Business: The CIA and Saddam Hussein," ABC News, June 27, 1997, 31:56-34:26, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZHHAI-eq2I>.

<sup>107</sup> Ed Blanche, "The Battle for Iraqi Intelligence," *Middle East*, July 2005, 14-15, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/docview/220647688/fulltext?accountid=8555>.; Hamid al-Bayati, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: An Insider's Account to the Opposition to Saddam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 104-05.; Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War Losing the Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 63.



hostility within the CIA for Chalabi and the INC that would endure throughout the invasion and occupation of Iraq.<sup>108</sup>

Chalabi did not wait long to put his plan for a popular uprising to the test, as tensions between the INC's key Kurdish elements, the PUK and KDP, escalated in 1994. The initial hope was that once presented with a concrete plan to launch a military campaign outside of the Kurdish region, the opportunity would be cause enough for the two Kurdish parties to set aside their differences, at least momentarily. Chalabi was alleged to have worked with the KDP since the 1970's, and had even known party founder Mustafa Barzani.<sup>109</sup> Yet even this long history of cooperation with the KDP was not enough to cool tensions between the rival factions indefinitely. The INC leadership at first presented the plan as backed by the U.S. government, but it was quickly abandoned after being criticized by the CIA.<sup>110</sup>

Yet the desire to push south was not abandoned so easily by Chalabi and other members of the opposition. In early 1995 the CIA became aware of an INC plot to abduct Saddam Hussein as he travelled to Ujah, Iraq, a town the INC felt confident he would flee to if Baghdad came under attack.<sup>111</sup> By capturing Saddam Hussein during coordinated attacks in both northern and southern Iraq, the intent was to create suitable conditions for

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<sup>108</sup> Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 115.

<sup>109</sup> David Corn and Michael Isikoff, *Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 110, eBook.

<sup>110</sup> Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Report on the Use by the Intelligence Community of Information Provided by the Iraqi National Congress*, 109th Cong., 2d sess., 2006, 9.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

the large-scale defections of the Iraqi military Chalabi believed were necessary for a people's uprising. The coup would be orchestrated with the assistance of former Iraqi military intelligence head General Wafiq al-Samarrai, as well as Shi'ci militias in southern Iraq such as Baqir al-Hakim's group, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Republic in Iraq (SCIRI). Al-Samarrai insisted that although no direct U.S. aid would be necessary, the coup would only succeed if the Iraqi military believed that the no-fly zone would be extended to cover the advance of opposition forces. However, the CIA informed al-Samarrai that the U.S. had no intention, either militarily or financially, of supporting an armed incursion into Iraq, or of creating the conditions for an uprising.

Despite this example of resistance to the Chalabi opposition's planned coup, the presence of a CIA official in Kurdistan to monitor the INC conveyed sentiments to the contrary. During a March 3, 1995 meeting with a representative of the Iranian intelligence service, a CIA officer lingered outside the meeting place, a presence that was taken to imply U.S. support for the coup to the Iranian agents. This suggestion was misleading, because according to a report from the Senate Intelligence Committee, the CIA had authorized "Chalabi to seek help of the Iranians" but not to imply that the U.S. backed the coup. The issue was made more contentious by the fact that it was reported Chalabi forged a letter from the U.S. blessing Iranian involvement in the coup and presented it to the Iranians during the meeting.<sup>112</sup> At yet another meeting held with the intention of recruiting SCIRI officials to back the coup, Chalabi reportedly assured them that "America has promised to prevent any action by the Iraqi army to target them; to impede Iraqi army tank

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 14.

movements in the cities, not in the marshes, via aerial bombardment; and to prevent Saddam's army from suppressing this initiative, through exploitation of resolutions 688 and 949." The report of the details of this meeting caused a "firestorm" in the National Security Council.<sup>113</sup>

By early March 1995, the INC prepared to launch a coup against Iraqi units stationed near northern Iraq. In response to communications from the CIA officer stationed with the INC, the National Security Council (NSC) cabled a warning: "The action you have planned for this weekend has been totally compromised... We believe there is a high risk of failure. Any decision to proceed will be entirely on your own."<sup>114</sup> Without U.S. support, Massoud Barzani abandoned the coup plot, leaving the INC coalition to engage with Iraqi forces with a weakened military contingent. Yet, at the outset of the four week campaign there were some success, including captured equipment and Iraqi soldiers. However, the advance began to lose momentum after failing to make any meaningful territorial or materiel gains, and was ultimately halted when a rival opposition group initiated fighting with INC forces.<sup>115</sup> When the fighting had ceased it became clear the coup had failed in its basic purpose: to inspire the Iraqi people to rise against the Ba'athist and to encourage Iraqi units to defect to the north.

After the offensive failed to yield any substantial materiel gains or foment a revolt, Wafiq al-Samarrai fled to Syria and the CIA began to reevaluate its cooperation

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 116-17.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 18.

with the INC. The March offensive ultimately became the nail in the coffin for relations between the CIA and the INC. Chalabi proved himself to be increasingly difficult to control and a liability for the operation at hand. A list of concerns was sent to the opposition from the CIA, with several directed at Chalabi himself. They stated that as a direct result of the offensive, “we need to clarify the basis on which we can work together in the future.”<sup>116</sup> While clearly a reminder that it was in fact the CIA that held all the cards in the relationship, the statement did not rule out a continued partnership in their “common objective” at that juncture. The list went on to include concerns over the fact that Chalabi had declared the plan enjoyed U.S. support, frustration over a lack of prior coordination that could endanger American lives, and concern that the opposition would be fractured as a result of the failed coup.<sup>117</sup>

From this point on things seemed only to deteriorate as a result of what the CIA perceived as a “breakdown in trust.”<sup>118</sup> While Chalabi had managed to woo some individuals within the agency, those who were not taken by his intellect and charm became more vocal in their opposition to him. Tensions caused by the hostility of those individuals ran particularly high in some cases, with one case officer reportedly threatening, in an expletive laden confrontation, to run Chalabi over outside his London residence in 1996.<sup>119</sup> An internal agency cable placed blame for the failed March coup,

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>119</sup> Roston, *The Man Who Pushed America to War*, 131.

referred to as the “debacle in the north”, entirely in Chalabi’s hands. In fact, according to a 2006 Senate Intelligence Committee report examining Chalabi’s relationship with the U.S., “The CIA reduced contact and support for the INC after the failed uprising and began intensifying efforts to develop contacts within the Iraqi military and other opposition groups.”<sup>120</sup> However, the CIA would not officially end contact with the INC until 1996 when it was forced out of Kurdistan after Massoud Barzani invited Iraqi forces to intervene in the most recent bout of fighting between the KDP and PUK. Interestingly, in the January 6, 1997 CIA memorandum outlining and confirming the termination of the relationship, the CIA’s previous list of grievances was not stated as a reason for the decision. Rather, it cited Chalabi’s “diminished” credibility “within the Iraqi opposition, in particular the KDP, as well as with USG’s regional partners”, in addition to the INC having lost its effectiveness as an opposition group.<sup>121</sup> As a result, in February 1997, the CIA officially cut funding for the INC, ending its U.S. sanctioned mission in northern Iraq as an umbrella group for the Iraqi opposition.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Report on the Use by the Intelligence Community of Information Provided by the Iraqi National Congress*, 23.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

## **B. The Lead-up to War**

### **1. *The Washington Blitz***

Following the expulsion of the INC from northern Iraq, Chalabi and his allies began a lobbying campaign in Washington D.C. aimed at reorienting the Iraqi policy of the United States. With the help of several prominent figures in the future administration of George W. Bush and other political actors, Chalabi was able to garner support for the Iraqi opposition in Washington D.C. This came at a time when domestic criticism of U.S. policy toward Iraq began to intensify. Many within the political establishment were dismayed at Saddam Hussein's violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions, as well as his defiance in the face of international scrutiny of Iraq's nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons programs. It was in this atmosphere that Chalabi, with the aid of his political allies and engagement with the press, was able to make major strides in gaining U.S. support for the INC.

One of the staunchest groups opposed to the way in which President Clinton handled affairs with Iraq emerged in 1997 under the banner of the Project for a New American Century (PNAC). This group of neoconservative thinkers and politicians concerned themselves with the "incoherent policies" President Clinton and aimed to reorient American foreign policy on a more assertive Reaganite path.<sup>123</sup> The June 3, 1997 Statement of Principles released by the group clearly outlined the adventurist foreign policy that would come to mark the presidency of George W. Bush. In the statement, the

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<sup>123</sup> Robert K. Brigham, *The United States and Iraq Since 1990: A Brief History with Documents* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 90.

group sought to pursue “a foreign policy that boldly and purposefully promotes American principles abroad” in order to “shape circumstances before crises emerge, and to meet threats before they become dire.”<sup>124</sup> Such language was later mirrored in the argument to preempt an attack launched by Saddam Hussein. The letter also stated what the signatories believed was the United States’ outsized role in the world, specifically “maintaining peace and security in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.”<sup>125</sup> Yet the pronouncements went beyond what the group thought what the U.S. should do, and strayed into laying out the framework that they believed the United States was obligated to, and in fact had a duty to, spread its ideals and systems of governance abroad. Indeed, the language employed in the statement of principles insinuates that the United States was shouldering a unique burden, and must “accept responsibility for America’s unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity, and our principles.”<sup>126</sup>

It was against this backdrop that on February 19, 1998, that PNAC submitted an open letter to President Clinton expressing dismay with U.S. Iraq policy and offering a solution. The points in this letter were nearly identical to plan laid out by Chalabi in the years prior, and surfaced in U.S. legislation several more times over the course of 1998. In abbreviated terms, the letter called for the U.S. to:

“Recognize a provisional government of Iraq based on the principles and leaders of the Iraqi National Congress (INC) that is

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 92.

representative of all the peoples of Iraq...Restore and enhance the safe haven in northern Iraq...and establish a zone in southern Iraq...Lift sanctions in liberated areas...the oil resources and products of the liberated areas should help fund the provisional government's insurrection and humanitarian relief for the people of liberated Iraq...Release frozen Iraqi assets...to the control of the provisional government...Facilitate broadcasts from U.S. transmitters immediately and establish a Radio Free Iraq...Remove any vestiges of Saddam's claim to 'legitimacy' by...bringing a war crimes indictment against the dictator and his lieutenants."<sup>127</sup>

Besides the call to empower the INC, the letter also criticized the policy of containment, alleged that Saddam Hussein had already acquired weapons of mass destruction, and – in a veiled critique of the CIA – criticized the strategy of “coups and international conspiracies” to depose Saddam Hussein. Some of its forty signatories would come to hold the most important positions in the administration of George W. Bush; these included: Richard Perle (Chairman of the Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee, January 2001-March 26, 2003),<sup>128</sup> Richard Armitage (Deputy Secretary of State, March 29, 2001-February 22, 2005),<sup>129</sup> John R. Bolton (Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs, May 11, 2001-July 31, 2005; U.S.

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<sup>127</sup> Solarz et al., “Open Letter to the President,” February 19, 1998, accessed September 14, 2013, <http://www.iraqwatch.org/perspectives/rumsfeld-openletter.htm>.

<sup>128</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, “Lunch with the Chairman,” *The New Yorker*, March 17, 2003, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/03/17/lunch-with-the-chairman>.; “US DOD: Secretary Rumsfeld statement on Richard Perle,” *M2 Presswire*, November 17, 2003, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/docview/443780665?pq-origsite=summon>.

<sup>129</sup> “Richard Lee Armitage (1945–),” U.S. Department of State, accessed January 27, 2016, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/armitage-richard-lee>.



ambassador to the U.N., August 2, 2005-December 31, 2006),<sup>130</sup> Douglas Feith (Under Secretary of Defense, July 2001-August 2005),<sup>131</sup> Zalmay Khalilzad (U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, 2003-2005; U.S. ambassador to Iraq, 2005-2007; U.S. ambassador to the U.N., 2007-2009),<sup>132</sup> Paul Wolfowitz (Deputy Secretary of Defense, 2001-2005),<sup>133</sup> and Donald Rumsfeld (Secretary of Defense, January 2001-December 2006).<sup>134</sup>

During the late 1990s Chalabi was benefitting greatly from his allies within the growing neoconservative movement. They provided an inroad to the halls of governance that would have been inaccessible otherwise, allowing him to make connections with which to push forward his strategy for toppling Saddam Hussein and instituting a democratic government. The most important of these connections was that of Richard Perle, who was introduced to Chalabi through Albert Wohlstetter.<sup>135</sup> Perle was an early and ardent follower, who seemed to genuinely believe that Ahmad Chalabi was the man to

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<sup>130</sup> “John R. Bolton (1948–),” U.S. Department of States, accessed January 27, 2016, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/bolton-john-r>.

<sup>131</sup> “Zalmay Khalilzad (1951–),” U.S. Department of State, accessed January 27, 2016, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/khalilzad-zalmay>.

<sup>132</sup> “Douglas J. Feith,” Douglas J. Feith, accessed January 27, 2016, <http://www.dougfeith.com/bio.html>.

<sup>133</sup> “Paul Wolfowitz,” American Enterprise Institute, accessed January 27, 2016, <https://www.aei.org/scholar/paul-wolfowitz/>.

<sup>134</sup> “Donald H. Rumsfeld,” U.S. Department of Defense, accessed January 27, 2016, <http://www.defense.gov/About-DoD/Biographies/Biography-View/Article/602800/donald-h-rumsfeld>.

<sup>135</sup> Janet McMahon and Robert Younes, “Post-Saddam U.S. leaders Garner, Bremer and Chalabi all have Neocon ties,” *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 22:5 (2003): 12, 59.

lead a post-Ba'athist Iraq. Through Perle, Chalabi would be introduced to multiple CIA directors, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and other prominent conservative figures. Chalabi was also a frequent speaker at the forums on Iraq and the Middle East at the conservative think-tank the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), where both Richard Perle and John R. Bolton were on the staff.

The AEI was also where Chalabi met David Wurmser, another conservative thinker who viewed the current U.S. posture toward Iraq as a failure. In 1999, Wurmser published a book through AEI Press entitled, *Tyranny's Ally: America's Failure to Defeat Saddam Hussein*.<sup>136</sup> The book was everything that the title implied, and it recounted the failures of the U.S. to supplant Saddam Hussein and to put in place a democratic system of governance. In the acknowledgements, Wurmser credits Chalabi as one of two “mentors” who had been influential in shaping his knowledge of the Middle East. Therefore it should not be surprising to learn that the book borrows heavily from ideas already espoused by Chalabi. Everything from the policy steps that Wurmser thought the U.S. should pursue in Iraq to the account of the events that transpired in Kurdistan between 1992 and 1996 would appear very familiar to anyone who had dealt with Ahmad Chalabi.

A key to Chalabi's success in Washington stemmed from the fact that not only was he speaking of ideas and plans that conservative actors were trying to achieve themselves, but he was also persuasive and influential enough to inspire people to adopt what was nearly his exact framework as their own. In fact, through Richard Perle, Chalabi

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<sup>136</sup> David Wurmser, *Tyranny's Ally: America's Failure to Defeat Saddam Hussein* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1999).

was able to brief the House Republican Policy Committee on February 19, 1998, where he met a key member of the House International Relations Committee, Stephen Rademaker. It was allegedly that meeting that caused Rademaker to pursue what became a major policy achievement for Chalabi and his allies, the *Iraq Liberation Act of 1998*.<sup>137</sup> H.R. 4655, or the *Iraq Liberation Act of 1998*, signed by President William Clinton on October 31, 1998 was the culmination of Chalabi's campaign of persuasion in Washington in the late 1990s. In brief, H.R. 4655 outlined the assistance the president was authorized to provide to Iraqi opposition groups. The first provision allocated USD 2 million for the support of radio and television broadcasting into Iraq. This was immediately followed by USD 97 million in military assistance, in the form of training and equipment to be provided by the Department of Defense. However, the bill allowed for no active combat role for U.S. forces, stating explicitly: "Nothing in this Act shall be construed to authorize or otherwise speak to the use of United States Armed Forces (except as provided in section 4(a)(2)) in carrying out this Act."<sup>138</sup> Assistance was also allocated for aiding civilians living under control of the groups designated to receive support under H.R. 4655, and the president was urged to convince the international community to try Saddam Hussein and other high level Ba'ath officials for war crimes. Potential recipients eligible to receive U.S. aid had to meet minimal and vague requirements. Specifically, they had to "include a broad spectrum of Iraqi individuals, groups, or both, opposed to the Saddam Hussein

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<sup>137</sup> Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 149-51.

<sup>138</sup> Section 4(a)(2) states in whole: *The President is authorized to direct the drawdown of defense articles from the stocks of the Department of Defense, defense services of the Department of Defense, and military education and training for such organizations.*

regime... committed to democratic values, to respect for human rights, to peaceful relations with Iraq's neighbors, to maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity, and to fostering cooperation among democratic opponents of the Saddam Hussein regime.” And should the Ba<sup>c</sup>thist regime ever be overthrown assistance was allocated to help any fledgling government transition to democracy.

H.R. 4655 came in the wake of a March 2, 1998 Senate hearing entitled, *Iraq: Can Saddam be Overthrown?*<sup>139</sup> The hearing was convened by the Foreign Relations Committee subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, and featured Ahmad Chalabi and former CIA director and ally, James Woolsey, as two of only four speakers. Chalabi’s testimony and questioning accounted for nearly fourteen of the thirty-six page official transcript, in which he laid out his vision and what he considered the necessary means for achieving the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Much of what appeared in H.R. 4655 would be spoken about at length by Chalabi during the hearing. He called for increased no-fly and no-armor zones, and pushed for protection from artillery as well. The INC’s dedication to democracy and inclusiveness were reiterated, as well as a commitment that a post-Ba<sup>c</sup>thist Iraq would renounce aggression as national policy. Chalabi encouraged the Senate to call for Saddam Hussein to be tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity in order to break “the limp handshake of appeasement.” He requested humanitarian aid for civilians living under areas controlled by the Iraqi opposition, and

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<sup>139</sup> 105<sup>th</sup> Congress of the United States of America, *Iraq: Can Saddam Be Overthrown?*, Washington D.C.: Senate Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, 1998.

recounted for dramatic effect a story about how INC broadcasts throughout Iraq had caused the Iraqi flag bearer for the 1996 Olympics to defect to the INC.

The idea of needing U.S. forces to actively participate was refuted, adding that the entire operation could be undertaken by the INC “for free”; though Chalabi backtracked on this statement when the discussion of acquiring arms for the opposition arose. However, the hearing was not just used as a forum for planning, but also to cast blame. A full recounting of Chalabi’s view of the events that had transpired during the INC’s venture into Kurdistan – and of the subsequent betrayal by the CIA – was given to the subcommittee. And presented with the opportunity, he even criticized his Petra Bank conviction and downplayed any problems it might cause with Jordan were the opposition to be supported.

Ultimately, the legislative push was a complete success. Between the Senate hearing and the signing of H.R. 4655, President William Clinton would enact a series of laws supporting the Iraqi opposition. Public Law 105-174, signed on May 1, 1998, would “establish a program to support the democratic opposition” as well as “to implement a program to compile information regarding allegations of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes by Iraq's current leaders.”<sup>140</sup> USD 5 million for broadcasting was allocated under Public Law 105-174 for Radio Free Iraq, as well as an additional USD 5 million for “organization, training, communication and dissemination of information, developing and implementing agreements among opposition groups, compiling

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<sup>140</sup> William J. Clinton, "Statement on Signing the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998," October 31, 1998.; 105<sup>th</sup> Congress of the United States of America, *Iraq Liberation Act*, Washington D.C.: House of Representatives 4655, 1998.

information to support the indictment of Iraqi officials for war crimes, and for related purposes.” Public Law 105-235, signed on August 14, 1998, declared “the Government of Iraq in unacceptable and material breach” of Security Council Resolutions 686 and 687, a step proposed by Chalabi during the hearing. Then, a mere ten days before signing H.R. 4655, President Clinton signed Public Law 105-277, on October 21, 1998, which in addition to including a stern appraisal of Iraq’s cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) set aside another USD 8 million in opposition funding.

This all came at an opportune time for reorienting foreign policy in the United States. Increasingly present was the now debunked narrative that Iraq was becoming increasingly uncooperative with international inspections, culminating in Iraq suspending all U.N. monitors the same day Clinton signed H.R. 4655. The result was Operation Desert Fox, a joint Anglo-American operation launched on December 16, 1998, tasked with bombing key targets in Iraq in order to limit its ability to produce weapons of mass destruction. Eighty-seven military, research and development, intelligence, economic, and infrastructure targets were destroyed during the campaign. After Operation Desert Fox it became clear that the possibility of forcing the removal or compliance of Saddam Hussein through containment or political pressure was unlikely. Conservative lawmakers and political actors continued to push for more assertive action with Iraq in order to both put pressure on President Clinton, as they felt he was dragging his feet with the opposition, and to keep Iraq a relevant issue. Iraq hawks were well aware that presidential elections were on the horizon and that the American public was increasingly concerned about the threat

posed by Saddam Hussein. With the election of a new president in the near future, they saw an opportunity to end what they viewed a mistake that began in 1991.

The moment the neocons were waiting for presented itself perhaps sooner than expected. The September 11, 2001 terror attacks provided the context need for a serious push for justifying regime change in Iraq. A mere nine days after the attacks PNAC once again injected itself into the discussion by sending a letter to President Bush entitled, “Toward a Comprehensive Strategy.”<sup>141</sup> Unsurprisingly, the letter offered now new methods for overthrowing Saddam Hussein, but merely attempted to tie Iraq to 9/11 and reiterated points it had laid out before. Such points included “full military and financial support to the Iraqi opposition”, and the creation of a “safe zone.”<sup>142</sup> Yet this letter can be in a way viewed as theater, or an attempt to force the issue further into the public sphere. Because by this point several members of PNAC had left the group to occupy key positions within the Bush Administration, laying the groundwork for turning the issues laid out in the letters into concrete results.

## ***2. Intelligence***

In the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, the newly elected President George W. Bush asked the CIA to explore whether or not there were any

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<sup>141</sup> Kristol et al, “Toward a Comprehensive Strategy,” September 20, 2001, accessed April 25, 2016, <http://www.iraqwatch.org/perspectives/pnac-letter-9-21-01.htm>.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

connections between the terrorists and Saddam Hussein. The response that came back was initially negative. However, there were those within the government that were not content to hear that answer, and government intelligence agencies were pushed to explore the possibility further. President Bush went on to name Iraq as one of the countries pursuing nuclear weapons on the “Axis of Evil” list during the January 19, 2002 State of the Union speech. It was against this backdrop that the INC began seeking out and supplying the U.S. government and media with Iraqi defectors who could link Saddam Hussein to the 9/11 attacks, and argue that he had not abandoned his pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.

The first indication that the INC was seeking out Iraqi defectors came in an October 12, 2001 *Washington Post* article. James Hoagland, a longtime Chalabi friend and *Washington Post* journalist, wrote about Sabah Khalifa Khodada al-Lami, a former Iraqi army officer who had allegedly served at what was being presented as a terrorist training facility south of Baghdad called Salman Pak. Al-Lami claimed that foreign Arab fighters were trained on the grounds for assassinations and hijackings, with a mocked-up Boeing 707 in the facility. Hoagland notes that the INC had located al-Lami in Fort Worth, Texas, where he had been trying to get in contact with the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation), and that the INC had conducted their own interview before passing him on to the journalist. The revelations in the article were branded as “mounting evidence of Iraqi involvement” in al-Qaeda terrorism, making Iraq “part and parcel of” any response in the



war on terror.<sup>143</sup> Two days later, in an interview for the *New York Times* and PBS's *Frontline*, al-Lami revealed more information about Saddam Hussein's alleged links to al-Qaeda. The October 14 interview offered a more specific set of claims, as well as a crudely drawn map of the Salman Pak facility. Al-Lami stated that the fighters, all of non-Iraqi origins, were trained directly by Iraqi intelligence services for "assassinations, kidnapping, hijacking of airplanes, hijacking of buses, public buses, hijacking of trains and all other kinds of operations"<sup>144</sup> with the express purpose of attacking American targets at home and abroad. When asked about Iraqi involvement in 9/11 he responded with certainty, "I assure you, this operation was conducted by people who were trained by Saddam. And I'm going to keep assuring the world this is what happened."<sup>145</sup>

However, there are inconsistencies in al-Lami's claims both within his own testimony and in the *Washington Post* article. Most obviously, yet perhaps trivial, was his role in the camp. In the article written by Jim Hoagland he presents himself as a trainer in Salman Pak, while in the *Frontline* and the *New York Times* pieces he claimed to have had only supply and administrative duties. It is important to point out that in the description of the interview currently on the *Frontline* website, there is a disclaimer posted next to the body text which reads: "there has been no verification of al-Lami's account of the activities at Salman Pak. In fact, U.S. officials have now concluded that Salman Pak was most likely

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<sup>143</sup> James Hoagland, "What About Iraq," *The Washington Post*, October 12, 2001, Editorials sec.

<sup>144</sup> Will Lyman, "Gunning for Saddam," *Frontline*, PBS, aired November 8, 2001, transcript, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/gunning/interviews/khodada.html>.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

used to train Iraqi counter-terrorism units in anti-hijacking techniques. It should also be noted that he and other defectors interviewed for this report were brought to *Frontline's* attention by the Iraqi National Congress (INC), a dissident organization that was working to overthrow Saddam Hussein.”

The next defector, identified later as former mukhabarat general Abu Zeinab al-Qurairy, appeared less than a month later, and was again presented to *Frontline* and the *New York Times*. The *New York Times* piece, written on November 8, 2001, attributed the origin of the interview to Ahmad Chalabi and the INC. The piece, entitled, “Defectors Cite Iraqi Training for Terrorism”<sup>146</sup>, included the interviews of both al-Lami and al-Qurairy, but offered up some new details that do not appear in the other articles. Of the claims, the one that stood out the most received only one sentence: that biological weapons were being produced inside the camp itself. No specific information was offered to expound upon the assertion other than that the man heading the program was German. But again, when visiting the *Frontline* site, the interview is accompanied with the same disclaimer as the al-Lami interview. One final defector would be presented on December 20, 2001 in an INC arranged interview for Judith Miller of the *New York Times*.<sup>147</sup> She reported on a man named Adnan Ihsan al-Haideri, an Iraqi defector who claimed to have personally worked on the physical structure of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons labs. Interestingly,

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<sup>146</sup> Chris Hedges, “Defectors Cite Iraqi Training for Terrorism,” *The New York Times*, November 8, 2001, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/docview/431923743?pq-origsite=summon>.

<sup>147</sup> Judith Miller, “Iraqi Tells of Renovations at Sites for Chemical and Nuclear Arms,” *The New York Times*, December 20, 2001, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/docview/431931881?OpenUrlRefId=info:xri/sid:summon&accountid=8555>.

al-Haideri's account had been ruled false by a CIA administered polygraph test less than a week before the interview took place. Al-Haideri spoke of his work maintaining and renovating the facilities, of having visited twenty sites himself, and was even aware of a facility located beneath Baghdad's largest hospital. It was also alleged in a private interview with INC intelligence officials that weapons in development at these facilities were secretly tested on Kurdish prisoners.

Early February saw another INC affiliated defector come to the public eye, this one, however, was by far the most important. A man who would be later identified as Muhammad Harith came forward with an account of mobile weapons labs in Iraq. He told *60 Minutes* that he had "purchased seven Renault refrigerated trucks for conversion into biological warfare laboratories."<sup>148</sup> His testimony would be used to corroborate the infamous informant Curveball (not an INC defector) who made similar claims that would become the backbone of the faulty intelligence that justified the invasion of Iraq. Harith was controversial for a reason other than the reliability of his information – that of how the information got to be used in the first place. In 2004 it was reported that former CIA director and INC ally James Woolsey used his contacts to bypass the CIA and deliver Harith's un-vetted information directly to Deputy Assistant Defense Secretary Linton Wells.<sup>149</sup> In circumventing Chalabi's most powerful foe, the CIA, Woolsey sought to ensure that the intelligence would not be thrown out due to any perceived CIA bias.

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<sup>148</sup> Jonathan S. Landay and Warren P. Strobel, "Former CIA Director Used Pentagon Ties to Introduce Iraqi Defector," *Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service*, July 16, 2004, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/special-reports/iraq-intelligence/article2 4441373.html>.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

However, the intelligence arm of the Defense Department, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), would later issue a notice that the intelligence was unreliable, though that did not stop it from finding its way into the trove of evidence deemed “credible” amassed in the effort to depose Saddam Hussein.

It is now well known that all of the intelligence provided by the INC supplied defectors was proven to be false. The CIA had refuted nearly all the claims of the defectors, as had the DIA. Even though the intelligence put forth by these men was actually flagged as faulty, some of it still came to be used as evidence for the justification of the invasion of Iraq. As a result of all of the questionable intelligence claims, including those supplied by the INC defectors, a report was published on March 31, 2005 analyzing the intelligence gathering process that lead up to the war. The members of the committee declared the information put forth by the intelligence community to be “dead wrong.” In the report’s own words:

“Shortly after Defense HUMINT’s initial debriefing of the INC source in February 2002...the CIA’s Directorate of Operations (DO) judged him to be a fabricator and recommended that Defense HUMINT issue a notice to that effect, which Defense HUMINT did in May 2002. Senior policymakers were informed that the INC source and his reporting were unreliable...Despite the fabrication notice, reporting from the INC source regarding Iraqi mobile BW facilities started to be used again several months later in finished intelligence—eventually ending up in the October 2002 NIE and in Secretary Powell’s February 2003 speech to the United Nations Security Council.”<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Silberman et al., *The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction*, March 31, 2005.

The findings of the report are quite strong, as they state that senior administration officials knowingly used faulty intelligence to justify the road to war. However, it should be noted that the report also found that in the case of the faulty information used by Colin Powell during a speech to the U.N., those tasked with organizing his speech were not aware that the faulty INC information was being used.<sup>151</sup> This, however, does not change the fact that other high-level officials within the government were aware that the information was being used despite warnings from both the CIA and DIA that it lacked credibility. That they ignored both the INC's enemy the CIA, as well as their own Defense Department allied agency, makes it very clear that no matter what the means need be, the incursion into Iraq was going to happen; and that Ahmad Chalabi's INC had a role in doing so.

### **C. Conclusion**

Chalabi's early interactions with the United States were harbingers of what was to come in the years after the invasion of Iraq. Despite being nominally under the purview of the United States, Chalabi steered the direction of the INC to suit his own goals and ambitions. He sought to use the specter of U.S. political and military intervention as a means to bolster his legitimacy while also indulging in infighting with his American backers at nearly every turn. He seemed to operate as though the United States were reliant on him and not, as was the reality, the other way around. Indeed, it was not until

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 179.

after he had been officially cut off by the CIA in 1997 that he fell back on a more cooperative stance with like-minded neoconservatives in the U.S. political establishment. Once engaged in the advocacy of regime change in Washington, Chalabi used every option at his disposal to try and ensure the U.S. was committed to military intervention in Iraq. He sought to make the overthrow of the Ba<sup>c</sup>thist regime U.S. law through a legislative blitz; he capitalized on his neoconservative allies occupying positions in the Bush administration; and he provided the press and U.S. government with Iraqi defectors that tied Saddam Hussein to the 9/11 attacks.

Appraisals by U.S. intelligence services seemed to have eliminated the usefulness of the intelligence supplied by the INC in an official capacity, despite figures within the U.S. government sympathetic to Chalabi seeking to use his information as a means to justify the war. In the instances where INC information did find its way into government intelligence briefs it was due to the lack of proper bureaucratic mechanisms to report to all necessary parties that the information had been flagged as “worthless.” But the area in which the faulty intelligence had the greatest affect was in the court of public opinion, as Chalabi had learned early in his quest to oust Saddam Hussein. The information disseminated by the INC helped to create an atmosphere in which the push for war with Iraq could succeed, allowing the Neo-Cons to assert an aggressive form of regime change. Indeed, as intelligence firm *Stratfor* summarized in 2010, “Chalabi did not inspire the U.S.

government to go to war in Iraq, it only provided the means to convince the American public that it was the right thing to do.”<sup>152</sup>

What this period demonstrated quite well was the access enjoyed by the INC to the upper reaches of U.S. power, and the lengths to which Ahmad Chalabi was prepared to go in pursuit of his life-long ambition of effecting regime change. Chalabi showed no hesitation in manufacturing information to bring about the start of a war to topple Saddam Hussein, and was able to mobilize U.S. legislative power and manipulate millions of dollars in pursuit of this aim. The same single mindedness – and the same unscrupulous dedication to his own and his family’s interests – would reappear after he returned to Iraq on the back of the US invasion in 2003.

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<sup>152</sup> “Special Series: Iranian Intelligence and Regime Preservation,” *Stratfor Global Intelligence*, June 22, 2010, accessed September 24, 2015, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/special-series-iranian-intelligence-and-regime-preservation>.

## CHAPTER V

### EXILE'S RETURN: CHALABI IN IRAQ: 2003-2010

Nearly a month after the U.S. invasion began on April 6, 2003, Ahmad Chalabi and other members of the INC were flown into southern Iraq onboard a U.S. military aircraft. The return was a low key affair, and he had in fact been kept at arms-length by the U.S. military to prevent him from interfering with ground operations. Support for Chalabi amongst the Neo-Cons in Washington remained high, but military commanders on the ground had no interest in Chalabi or his party, which contributed to confusion as to the INC's role in Iraq. Though he and the armed wing attached to the INC, the Free Iraqi Forces (FIF), were left stranded at an airfield near Nasiriyya for more than a week, Chalabi immediately set out to make himself known amongst the locals. The first way he sought to establish himself was with the presence of the FIF itself, which he claimed was essential "to maintain political credibility with the Iraqi people."<sup>153</sup> Indeed, given the fact that Chalabi had not been to Iraq in forty-five years, establishing credibility was a top priority. A rally was held in Nasiriyya on April 11, 2003 in which Chalabi addressed a crowd of several thousand people. He met with tribal sheikhs and other local leaders, and claimed to

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<sup>153</sup> Craig S. Smith, "Iraqi Exile Moves Fast to Establish a Presence," *New York Times*, April 12, 2003, B10.



have met with “every significant non-Baathist local political figure.”<sup>154</sup> But beyond name recognition, many Iraqis knew very little about Ahmad Chalabi other than the fact that he had at least nominal support from the U.S. and was convicted of fraud in Jordan. He attempted to play down these assertions, claiming that, “Every person of significance I have met since arriving here knew exactly who I was, what the INC stands for, who my family...were before the coups and what we did.”<sup>155</sup> However the reality on the ground was very different – and in many ways illustrative of Chalabi’s future dilemmas in Iraqi politics: his family was well known in elite circles in Iraq, but to the majority of Iraqis he was just another exile politician.

This entrance into Iraq marked the beginning of the last period in Chalabi’s quest to re-forge Iraq. Unlike the previous periods in Chalabi’s life, after the invasion he had more direct control and power to do what he wanted in Iraq. Though the presence and influence of the United States was still inescapable, he was able to maneuver more and create alliances that he would attempt to capitalize on to help his ascent. Yet, this period was also dogged by his reckless ambition and mistakes that would cost him dearly over the years to come.

On April 16, 2003, Ahmad Chalabi arrived in Baghdad for the first time since 1958, and he immediately went to work carving out his place in the new Iraq. As he had done in Nasiriyya, Chalabi began holding morning sessions where he entertained local leaders and people of prominence to hear grievances and explain his plans for Iraq. While

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<sup>154</sup> David Rose, “Exile Takes Center Stage,” *The Observer*, April 13, 2003.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

Chalabi secured a headquarters for the INC party members and the FIF were dispatched to various government offices – including those of the former state security services – to collect intelligence. Among the estimated twenty-five tons of files INC sequestered were the files of Iraq’s mukhabarat, which he is alleged to have kept to curry influence with the various actors in Iraq.<sup>156</sup> In the months after his return to Baghdad Chalabi also launched a more conventional public relations campaign, dispatching people to place party posters around the city and publishing the INC newspaper, *al-Mu’tamar*.

*Al-Mu’tamar* served largely as a mouthpiece for the Iraqi National Congress to discredit those perceived as enemies or rivals to Chalabi, as well as to defend and boost his image. In one such instance Adnan Pachachi, a former Iraqi minister and favorite of the U.S. State Department, was disparaged for supposedly standing in the way of elections, opposing the constitution, and encouraging terrorism.<sup>157</sup> Yet at the same time the paper praised Chalabi’s formation of the Shi’a Political Council, portraying it as the foundation of an umbrella organization for Shi’i “political parties, movements and currents,” which happened to include Moqtada al-Sadr.<sup>158</sup> Chalabi’s issues with the Jordanian government also appeared when it was reported that a lawsuit filed by Chalabi in U.S. courts “frightens” them, yet conversely the paper opted not to report on the election of Chalabi’s

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<sup>156</sup> Christopher Dickey and Michael Hosenball, “Banker, Schmoozer, Spy,” *Newsweek*, May 12, 2003.

<sup>157</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 78.; “Iraq’s Al-Chalabi paper criticizes Al-Pachachi campaign to delay election,” *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, December 5, 2004.

<sup>158</sup> “Shi’i body backing Al-Sadr meets Iraqi rulers to discuss Al-Najaf (10 August),” *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, August 11, 2004.

Jordanian supported rival, Ayad Allawi, to the premiership.<sup>159</sup> The state of Chalabi's political misfortunes and currents were also reflected in the reporting. In the aftermath of a political scandal involving Chalabi, *al-Mu'tamar* reported that President George W. Bush had personally signed off on a plan for his "political assassination" in a report forwarded to the U.S. embassy in Baghdad by Condoleezza Rice.<sup>160</sup> It also printed an article, at a time when the INC was struggling to acquire widespread local support, in which Chalabi accused Iraqi ministries of "consolidating the occupation" through their support for a Coalition backed newspaper, *al-Sabah*.<sup>161</sup> Additionally, an unattributed article appeared in the paper on December 16, 2003, claiming that after his capture Saddam Hussein had requested a private meeting with Chalabi, who is referred to as "one of the most important leaders of the council [IGC]" during which he aired fears of being handed to the Iraqi people and asked to be spared from death.<sup>162</sup> These articles, as well as others, provide a snapshot of some of the obstacles that Chalabi faced in the future: a complicated relationship with the United States, allying himself with figures who openly and violently opposed the occupation, advancing divisive rhetoric to suit political needs, alienating

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<sup>159</sup> "Iraqi paper says Jordan frightened by Al-Chalabi's US lawsuit," *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, September 17, 2004.; "Al-Jazeera reviews Iraqi press on selection of new prime minister," *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, May 29, 2004.

<sup>160</sup> "Iraqi National Congress leader accuses US of plotting his political assassination," *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, September 5, 2004.

<sup>161</sup> "Iraqi National Congress criticizes ministerial support for Coalition paper," *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, March 17, 2004.

<sup>162</sup> Included in the article was a photo with a caption reading, "After Saddam begged his jailers to meet Al-Chalabi, Al-Mu'tamar publishes historic photo of Dr. Al-Chalabi with the detained tyrant."; "Iraq: Saddam expresses concerns at meeting with council's Al-Chalabi," *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, December 18, 2003.

political colleagues, struggling to maintain a significant political base, and grappling with elements of his past which sullied his name.

The path Chalabi embarked upon in Iraq had clear and detrimental consequences for the political environment in Iraq. His corrupt political practices hurt not only his image amongst Iraqi voters but helped to define a system in which ministerial corruption was the norm. The gross misapplication of the de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification program contributed to the central government's ability to function efficiently, as well as creating fears and tensions within the Sunni community. De-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification became the main tool with which Chalabi sought to assert himself, going as far as to interfere in elections and attempt to use the program to forge political outcomes as he saw fit. His aggressive aspirations and decisions forged a rift between himself and the United States and forced Chalabi to further embrace and engage with equally ambitious allies pursuing their own ways to influence to direction and future of Iraq.

#### **A. The Structure of Authority**

Iraq after the 2003 invasion was famously chaotic. It became clear immediately after Baghdad fell that U.S. forces and the civilian administrations that followed were unprepared for the task of rebuilding Iraq. While a year had been spent planning the invasion itself, not even a fraction of the same amount of time was dedicated to planning the reconstruction. The populace in Baghdad quickly turned to looting government properties and eventually seized upon the chaotic situation to settle scores with their

neighbors as coalition troops stood by. To demonstrate how unprepared the civilian administration was for confronting the situation L. Paul Bremer III, the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), would infamously suggest that U.S. forces shoot a few looters to discourage the rest. This situation was hardly what Chalabi or backers in the Bush administration had envisioned a post-Ba<sup>c</sup>thist Iraq to look like. What ensued was a period of confusion and violence that plagued Iraq until and beyond the U.S. withdrawal, and Ahmad Chalabi would nonetheless attempt to turn it to his advantage.

The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), headed by former State Department official Paul Bremer, was the body tasked with the reconstruction and governance of Iraq from May 12, 2003-June 28, 2004.<sup>163</sup> In a move that is perhaps indicative of subsequent U.S. efforts in Iraq, Bremer replaced retired general Jay Garner, who was the director of the organization initially tasked with the reconstruction, the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), after only one day. Bremer was responsible for implementing orders that would have a profound effect on Iraq, such as disbanding the Iraqi army and issuing the order for de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification. Most of the orders would come from Washington, especially from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Under Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith.<sup>164</sup> Despite the fact that Bremer was “Washington’s

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<sup>163</sup> James Dobbins et al., *Occupying Iraq: The History of the Coalition Provisional Authority* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2009), iii.

<sup>164</sup> Rumsfeld and Feith occupied the top two positions in the Defense Department, advising the president on defense and national security matters, and maintained responsibility for setting the course and policies of the war and occupation.

senior representative in Baghdad, he was also Iraq's top official.”<sup>165</sup> CPA authority was regularly challenged by Iraqi politicians who balked at the idea of U.S. military rule and demanded an immediate transfer of authority to an interim government.

With confusion on the ground, as well as a lack of clear communication with the various U.S. services moving into Iraq, the United States was hesitant to instantly return ruling authority to the Iraqis, waiting until July 13, 2003 to form the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), an interim government subordinate to the CPA. The IGC was a representative body of Iraqi politicians appointed by the CPA that acted largely in an advisory capacity. A rotating chairman was chosen by the IGC on a monthly basis from amongst the Iraqi representatives appointed by the U.S. administration. The IGC was replaced nearly a year later on June 28, 2004 with the Iraqi Interim Government (IIG), which was recognized by the international community as a sovereign Iraqi government and headed by Ayad Allawi, but still did not wield complete power. Lakhdar Brahimi, the U.N. Special Envoy, formed the IIG cabinet after consultations with the CPA and other American officials.<sup>166</sup> May 6, 2005 marked the formation of the Iraqi Transitional Government (ITG) headed by Ibrahim Jafaari, which served as the official government of Iraq until the spring of 2006 when the first permanent government was formed through popular elections. The December 2005 elections placed Nuri al-Maliki in the premiership

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<sup>165</sup> James Dobbins et al., *Occupying Iraq: The History of the Coalition Provisional Authority* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2009), 14.

<sup>166</sup> “Iraq: the interim government leaders.” Sharon Otterman, accessed April 25, 2016, <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/iraq-interim-government-leaders/p7664>.

in early 2006, where he remained even after the withdrawal of U.S. forces in December 2011.

A brutal insurgency quickly gripped Iraq due in large part to the decision to disband the Iraqi army. Bremer's order left a large number of unemployed, armed soldiers to fight against an occupying force which had robbed them of their livelihoods. The order was in fact a surprise to many on the ground in Iraq, as elements of U.S. forces were working with former Iraqi commanders to have their troops ready to be reinstated within a matter of days. Events escalated further with the implementation of the de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification process. De-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification was viewed by many Sunnis as a system of vengeance wielded by Shi<sup>c</sup>i politicians, in particular by Ahmad Chalabi. But Chalabi viewed the program as key to the rehabilitation of Iraq, and had even stated that one of the purposes of the FIF was to help enforce it.<sup>167</sup> Yet as the following section demonstrates, time and again Chalabi was accused of exploiting the program to serve his own political ends. Ultimately, the system caused Sunni areas to be more hesitant in trusting an Iraqi government they felt was not only not working in their interest, but was also a vehicle of oppression.

This issue was compounded by an increase in al-Qaeda allied and Sunni Islamist groups surfacing in Iraq to fight coalition forces, and embedding themselves in Sunni areas such as Fallujah and Samarra in the process. In contrast to the Sunni fighters, Shi<sup>c</sup>i militias, many of which had the backing of Iran, began to vie for power over the various Shi<sup>c</sup>i enclaves. Iranian support was especially strong with Moqtada al-Sadr, a young militant cleric from Najaf who commanded the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia and engaged

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<sup>167</sup> Smith, "Iraqi Exile Moves Fast to Establish a Presence."

violently with coalition forces most famously in Najaf and Basra. These events had an adverse effect on politics in Baghdad as cross-communal parties struggled to maintain members and politicians were driven into making increasingly sectarian appeals.

Yet the Iranian presence in Iraq was difficult for U.S. forces to counter due in large part to several influential Shi'ci parties and politicians supported by Tehran. Bakr al-Hakim, the leader of one of the more prominent Shi'ci parties, SCIRI, was at the time of the invasion based in Tehran. Many Iraqis openly stated that they would not tolerate SCIRI's exclusion from a future government.<sup>168</sup> Moqtada al-Sadr had also studied to become a cleric and commanded the most aggressive Shi'ci militia in the fight against coalition forces. The influence and money of Tehran was of great appeal to the various parties vying for influence in the Iraqi government, especially those that lacked broad political support. With the backing of Tehran, sectarian Shi'ci parties had the ability to mobilize their sizable voting blocs against the coalition, and if need be send the insurgency spiraling into intense confrontations with U.S. forces.

As the coalition struggled to maintain a grip on the security of Iraq, the reconstruction process stalled, mired in an excess of bureaucracy and little-to-no post-war planning. Conflicting points of view in Washington and on the ground in Iraq would only further inflame these problems, ending all hopes of a smooth transition to local rule. Returning from exile on the back of the U.S. invasion, Ahmad Chalabi would attempt to use these conditions to try and implement his own plans for Iraq. By utilizing his newfound positions in the Iraqi government, as well as his various relationships with the

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.



emerging players on the new political landscape, he would attempt to bring to life everything he had dreamt of since his exile began.

## **B. De-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification**

The de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification program was an early and enduring example of the problematic policies pursued in post-invasion Iraq, and it involved Chalabi from the outset. An early public record of the conceptualization of the program surfaced in a February 19, 2003 op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*. In it Chalabi argued, “it is essential to end the Ba<sup>c</sup>thist control over all aspects of politics and civil society. Iraq needs a comprehensive program of de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification even more extensive than the de-Nazification effort in Germany after World War II. You cannot cut off the viper’s head and leave the body festering.”<sup>169</sup> A statement such as this, in a context where de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification was viewed in sectarian terms, was more than a little controversial. Comparing those in the Ba<sup>c</sup>th Party with the rotting body of a snake was language that seemed to encourage retribution rather than reconciliation. This was the fine line that program crossed repeatedly, leading to the perception that it was a tool of Shi<sup>c</sup>i vengeance against the Sunni community. However, under the leadership of Ahmad Chalabi the program took on a secondary role: operating as a vehicle for removing those individuals who stood ideologically apart from Chalabi or who threatened his chances of obtaining pivotal positions in government.

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<sup>169</sup> Ahmad Chalabi, “Iraq for the Iraqis,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 19, 2003.

The de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification program became official on May 16, 2003, when CPA administrator L. Paul Bremer III issued Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 1, *De-Ba'athification of Iraqi Society*.<sup>170</sup> The order sought to “ensure the representative government in Iraq is not threatened by Ba<sup>c</sup>thist elements returning to power.” CPA Order Number 1 banned members of the top four tiers of the Ba<sup>c</sup>th Party from holding public office and placed them under criminal review. The order made the top three management tiers of every “government ministry, affiliated corporations and other government institutions (e.g., universities and hospitals)” also subject to criminal review; and removed Ba<sup>c</sup>thist images from government and public spaces, while announcing that exceptions to the order could be made “on a case-by-case basis.”

On the same day Bremer released CPA Memorandum Number 1, *Implementation of De-Ba'athification Order No. 1*,<sup>171</sup> outlining the process for de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification. The memorandum states that Accreditation and Review Committees (ARCs) would handle the de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification process until the Iraqi government was adequately vetted and capable of carrying out the process independently. ARCs would consist of three members, one military and two civilian, with one of the civilians being an Iraqi. However, nine days later on May 25, 2003, Bremer signed another order, CPA Order Number 5, *Establishment of*

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<sup>170</sup> L. Paul Bremer, *Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 1: De-Ba'athification of Iraqi Society*, Baghdad: CPA, 16 May 2003.

<sup>171</sup> L. Paul Bremer, *Coalition Provisional Authority Memorandum Number 1: Implementation of De-Ba'athification Order Number 1*, Baghdad: CPA, 16 May 2003.

*the Iraqi De-Ba'athification Council.*<sup>172</sup> “The Council”, as it was referred to, was to be comprised entirely of Iraqis and subject to the authority of Bremer, who would set a date for the Council’s activation. Only two months after issuing CPA Order Number 5, the CPA authorized the creation of the Iraqi Governing Council, which under the leadership of Ahmad Chalabi created the Higher National De-Ba’athification Commission (HNDC) in August.<sup>173</sup> One of the first things the HNDC did was expand the purview of the HNDC to include “civil society, the press, and the media.”<sup>174</sup>

These orders were passed despite State Department and Central Intelligence officials advocating for a more lenient version of the program. In part this conflict was due to exceptionally frigid relations between the Department of Defense and the two civilian agencies, who had continually butted heads during the planning phases of the invasion. A draft of the law was given to Bremer the day before he left for Iraq by Douglas Feith, the plan’s main architect, outlining the more stringent version of de-Ba’athification to be implemented.<sup>175</sup> The final version of the plan would emerge after Bremer consulted with Iraqi politicians. In the case of the disbanding of the Iraqi army, which took place on May 23, 2003 with the issuance of Coalitional Provisional Order Number 2, CPA officials

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<sup>172</sup> L. Paul Bremer, *Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 5: Establishment of the Iraqi De-Baathification Council*, Baghdad: CPA, 25 May 2003.

<sup>173</sup> Abdulrazzaq Al-Saiedi and Miranda Sissons, *A Bitter Legacy: Lessons of De-Baathification in Iraq* (New York: International Center for Transitional Justice, 2013), 12.

<sup>174</sup> Dobbins et al., *Occupying Iraq: The History of the Coalition Provisional Authority*, 117.

<sup>175</sup> L. Paul Bremer III, *My Year in Iraq* (New York, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 37.

believed it was a necessary gesture to the Iraqi people to demonstrate that the U.S. was completely dedicated to ensuring that the Ba<sup>c</sup>th Party and Saddam Hussein would not be returning to power.<sup>176</sup>

Then on December 9, 2003, Bremer sent a cable to Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, and Reuben Jeffery, an advisor to Bremer, entitled, *De-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification: An Iraqi Process*.<sup>177</sup> The message was a preview of the yet to be signed CPA Memorandum Number 7, which terminated CPA and coalition authority over de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification and handed it over to the IGC. After its signing, de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification was completely under the purview of the HNDC, and more specifically its IGC appointed chairman, Ahmad Chalabi. Bremer's confidence in the move did not last long, however, as six days later he suggested suspending the entire program.<sup>178</sup> Yet, on the recommendation of Scott Carpenter, CPA Director of Governance, and the positive briefing Chalabi gave to coalition commanders, the order was ultimately kept in place, and U.S. oversight into the de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification process was in practice eliminated.<sup>179</sup> Hardly a month later Chalabi outlined the HNDC's strategy on January 11, 2004, announcing that a

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<sup>176</sup> Will Lyman, "The Lost Year in Iraq," *Frontline*, PBS, aired October 17, 2006.

<sup>177</sup> L. Paul Bremer, *De-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification: An Iraqi Process*, Baghdad: CPA, December 9, 2003.

<sup>178</sup> Dobbins et al., *Occupying Iraq: The History of the Coalition Provisional Authority*, 118.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

highly contested figure of 28,000 employees had already been removed from office,<sup>180</sup> most of whom turned out to be individuals dependent on Ba<sup>c</sup>th Party membership for employment rather than party ideologues.<sup>181</sup>

Chalabi viewed any outside input into de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification as evidence that the Ba<sup>c</sup>thists were returning to power, at least this is the view that he espoused publicly. This is most visibly enshrined in an April 15, 2004 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed entitled “Occupation Fatigue.”<sup>182</sup> In it he criticized the CPA’s refusal to allow the HNDC to investigate newly recruited police officers and soldiers, viewing it as an intrusion on the mission of his office. The idea of reconciliation was derided as a threat to the Iraqi Shi<sup>c</sup>i community who view it as a path back to subjugation under the Ba<sup>c</sup>thists, whom Chalabi claimed were returning to power. Also, according to the piece, criticism of de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification by U.S. politicians was actively fueling sectarian violence in Iraq, and Chalabi singled out Senator Carl Levin and Senator John D. Rockefeller IV for driving “the Shia majority...into the arms of Sadr.” The targeting of Senators Rockefeller and Levin was in response to unfavorable criticism they made in a March 18, 2004 televised press conference.<sup>183</sup> The two had recently returned from a brief exploratory trip to Iraq, and offered a harsh criticism of the de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification process, which included Senator

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<sup>180</sup> Richard O. Hatch, “A Year of De-Baathification in Post-Conflict Iraq: Time for Mid-Course Corrections and a Long-Term Strategy,” *Journal of Human Rights* 4 (2005): 106.

<sup>181</sup> Eric Herring and Glen Rangwala, *Iraq in Fragments The Occupation and its Legacy* (London: Hurst & Company, 2006), 73.

<sup>182</sup> Ahmad Chalabi, “Occupation Fatigue,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 15, 2004.

<sup>183</sup> C-SPAN, “Congressional Trip to Iraq,” *C-SPAN* video, March 18, 2004. <http://www.c-span.org/video/?181032-1/congressional-trip-iraq>.

Rockefeller commenting that, “I simply cannot calibrate in my mind as a way of progressing” the decision to put Chalabi in charge of the de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification process. The piece in the *Wall Street Journal* was by no means the only instance of Chalabi criticizing U.S. input and concerns in the de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification process in a conservative public forum, however it was the most aggressive and accusatory one aimed at the general American public. Instances such as these also help to give credence to what many saw as Chalabi’s turn toward sectarian politics once he returned to Baghdad. As Iraqi politician Mahmoud al-Mashadani said in 2010, Chalabi’s actions at the HNDC and AJC demonstrated he was “a fish that only survives in a sea of sectarianism. If that dries up, he’ll die.”<sup>184</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of Chalabi’s application of de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification the process of appeals and reinstatements suffered heavily. More and more the program resembled a system of outright political purges than a program of reconciliation; and the CPA soon reached the conclusion that Chalabi was “exploiting the process to further his own political ambitions.”<sup>185</sup> A common complaint from those accused or dismissed was that the HNDC did not distinguish between the upper tier officials who had a part in overseeing the conduct of the regime and the lower tiers of membership consisting of normal employees. Party membership was mandatory for many public sector employees such as teachers, doctors, and soldiers, and the sweeping dismissals in the early stage of the process left many hospitals and universities severely understaffed. In fact, from the

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<sup>184</sup> Hill, “Former Speaker on De-Ba’athification, Iran, and Post-elections Government Formation,” WikiLeaks, 10BAGHDAD347, February 10, 2010, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/02/10BAGHDAD347.html>.

<sup>185</sup> Dobbins et al., *Occupying Iraq: The History of the Coalition Provisional Authority*, 119.

beginning Chalabi made it clear he felt there was no room for reconciliation in the de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification process, at one point declaring, “reconciliation is an inappropriate term... Who will reconcile with whom? Will those buried in mass graves reconcile with those who killed them?”<sup>186</sup> Chalabi and the U.S. government differed so dramatically on how they envisioned de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification that during the drafting of the Iraqi constitution Senior Advisor on Iraq James Jeffery stated “he would not listen to Chalabi on de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification.”<sup>187</sup> But that did not prevent de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification from being enshrined in the constitution. It was included as article 135, fueled by the deteriorating condition of Iraq in 2005 through both violence and corruption, and fears of a resurgence of the Ba<sup>c</sup>th Party.<sup>188</sup>

The Iraqi Special Tribunal (IST) was controversial for numerous reasons. One of which being that Ahmad Chalabi’s nephew, Salem Chalabi, was general director of the tribunal before resigning in light of an arrest warrant for murder.<sup>189</sup> However, in respect to

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<sup>186</sup> Hatch, “A Year of De-Baathification in Post-Conflict Iraq: Time for Mid-Course Corrections and a Long-Term Strategy,” 103.

<sup>187</sup> Untermeyer, “Qatar: S/I Jeffrey’s October 6, 2005 Meeting with Foreign Minister Hamad Bin Jassim al-Thani,” WikiLeaks, 05DOHA1752, October 19, 2005, accessed March 1, 2014, [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05DOHA1752\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05DOHA1752_a.html).

<sup>188</sup> Al-Saiedi and Sissons, *A Bitter Legacy: Lessons of De-Baathification in Iraq*, 15.

<sup>189</sup> John Laughland, *A History of Political Trials from Charles I to Saddam Hussein* (Oxfordshire: Peter Lang Ltd, 2008), 244.; Salem Chalabi was charged on August 8, 2004 for the May 28, 2004 murder of Haitham Fadhil, director-general of the Ministry of Finance. It was reported by the *New York Times* and *The Guardian* that Fadhil had been auditing the Chalabi family’s finances and real estate in Iraq and that Fadhil had received numerous threats from Salem Chalabi. At the same time Ahmad Chalabi was charged with counterfeiting Iraqi dinars. Some considered both cases of charges to be politically motivated attacks by political opponent Ayad Allawi. In September 2004 charges were dropped against Ahmad Chalabi, and in December 2004 the charges against Salem Chalabi were dropped due to insufficient evidence.; Brian Whitaker and Michael

de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification the controversy stemmed from the status of the judiciary itself. In early June it came to the attention of the U.S. embassy that the HNDC was about to order the removal of thirteen judges and ban them from presiding over the IST. Powers delegated to the HNDC did not include the authority to interfere with the judiciary, and the attempted dismissal of nearly a quarter of the tribunal's judges was naturally viewed as a politically motivated move. One name on the list in particular raised eyebrows among both American and Iraqi officials – that of Judge Ra<sup>c</sup>d Juhi. Judge Ra<sup>c</sup>d was tasked with presiding over the trial of Saddam Hussein, but he also happened to be the judge who issued an arrest warrant for Moqtada al-Sadr for ordering the murder of Shi<sup>c</sup>i cleric <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Majid al-Khoei. Chalabi and al-Sadr had grown increasingly close during the occupation, at one point toying with the idea of a political alliance in an attempt to maximize Shi<sup>c</sup>i votes. By dismissing Judge Ra<sup>c</sup>d, it became abundantly clear that Chalabi was using the HNDC to protect political allies.<sup>190</sup>

Less clear, however, was what motivated the order to remove judge Sa<sup>c</sup>id al-Hamashi as chief judge of the al-Dujayl Trial.<sup>191</sup> Judge al-Hamashi replaced Rizgar Amin as chief judge after the latter's resignation on January 10, 2006, and was subsequently

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Howard, "Salem Chalabi: Wanted for murder of finance official," *The Guardian*, August 10, 2004.; Edward Wong, "Iraqi judge closes case against Ahmad Chalabi," *The New York Times*, September 28, 2004.; "Ahmad Chalabi Fast Facts," *CNN*, November 4, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/05/world/meast/ahmed-chalabi-fast-facts/>.

<sup>190</sup> John Burns, "Ignoring U.S., Chalabi Pursues Attempt to Fire Saddam Judge," *The New York Times*, July 27, 2005.

<sup>191</sup> On October 29, 2005 began the al-Dujayl Trial, the tribunal which would ultimately lead to the execution of Saddam Hussein and seven other Ba<sup>c</sup>th Party members for the deportation, torture, and execution of around eight hundred people from the Iraqi town of Dujayl from 1982-1985.



ordered off the bench for prior Ba'ath Party membership. This was in spite of the fact that article 135 of the constitution states: "Mere membership in the dissolved Ba'ath Party shall not be considered a sufficient basis for referral to court", and that members of the judiciary were not subject to de-Ba'athification.<sup>192</sup> Al-Hamashi denied the claims, but was ultimately moved to another court and replaced by Judge Rauf Rashid 'Abd al-Rahman. Chalabi and the HNDC were extremely aggressive in their application of the de-Ba'athification program, but it was unclear what practical benefit was gained from the removal of Sa'id al-Hamashi, a Shi'i, from the trial. However, when considering the fact that judge 'Abd al-Rahman was a Kurdish judge from Halabja, a Kurdish town that was bombed by Saddam Hussein with chemical weapons, then the potential logic for the removal of al-Hamashi becomes apparent.

The political maneuvering of the HNDC was not limited to disqualifying members of the judiciary. The HNDC attempted to disqualify 181 parliamentary candidates<sup>193</sup> before the 2005 elections, and another 511 candidates before the 2010 elections,<sup>194</sup> in both of which Chalabi and his deputy, Ali Faisal al-Lami, were running for office. In both instances Chalabi used his position as head of the HNDC and its successor,

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<sup>192</sup> Colin Blackstock, "Saddam Judge in Ba'athist Row," *The Guardian*, January 19, 2006, accessed September 20, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/jan/19/iraq.colinblackstock>.

<sup>193</sup> Khalilzad, "IECI Posts Complete Candidates Lists Without Removing De-Ba'ath Names; Reserves Right to Disqualify Later," WikiLeaks, 05BAGHDAD4870, December 6, 2005, accessed October 11, 2015, [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05BAGHDAD4870\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05BAGHDAD4870_a.html).

<sup>194</sup> W. Andrew Terrill, "Lessons of the Iraqi De-Ba'athification Program for Iraq's Future and the Arab Revolutions" (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, May 2012), 50.

the Accountability and Justice Commission (AJC), to try and bolster his standing with the Shi'ci voting bloc by being tough on those caught up in the de-Ba'athification process. This forced other politicians and parties not deemed "Ba'athist" to adopt similarly staunch positions, therefore prioritizing campaign politics above reconciliation.<sup>195</sup> Such tactics served only to further drive a wedge between the Shi'ci and Sunni communities, creating a political atmosphere where sectarianism flourished and secular parties fared poorly as voters rallied around their respective communities.

Casting Sunnis as a threat was not a new tactic for Chalabi, he maintained from the start that the insurgency was a solely Ba'athist orchestrated phenomenon and regularly harped on the specter of neighboring Sunni powers meddling in Iraq's affairs. At a political meeting in 2009 he even went as far to claim that "Jordanian intelligence had unsuccessfully tried to promote a coup d'état and that Qatar was funding efforts to shape Iraq's political landscape, with Jordan running the operation and Israel blessing it."<sup>196</sup> U.S. patience with Chalabi's tenure in the AJC was wearing thin at this point, especially in light of public claims he made in late 2009 that the U.S. was attempting to facilitate the reintegration of Ba'athist officials into the top tiers of the Iraqi government. The attempted disqualification of the 511 candidates from upcoming elections in 2010 drew more than an annoyed rebuke from the U.S. A section entitled "Vet the Winners Approach" from an

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<sup>195</sup> Ford, "De-Ba'athification and the Elections: A Complex and Muddled Process," WikiLeaks, 10BAGHDAD422, February 17, 2010, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/02/10BAGHDAD422.html>.

<sup>196</sup> Hill, "Chalabi on Larijani Visit, Iran, and Iraqi Electoral Politics," WikiLeaks, 09BAGHDAD2910, October 31, 2009, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/10/09BAGHDAD2910.html>.

embassy cable dated January 17, 2010<sup>197</sup> revealed that U.S. officials felt “Chalabi and his supporters were making a mockery of the electoral process”, and that the U.S. was ready to pull support from the elections in response. The following March, two days before elections were held, Chalabi launched an attack of his own in the U.S. media. In the *Wall Street Journal* he accused U.S officials of interfering in Iraqi elections and in the de-Ba’athification process by attempting to limit the political freedoms of the Iraqi government.<sup>198</sup> But despite the attempt to thin the competition many of the disqualifications were ignored and Chalabi’s bid for parliamentary success failed. Both Ayad Allawi’s and Nuri al-Maliki’s parties fared well, leaving Chalabi and al-Lami without a single seat in Parliament due to his self-serving political maneuvering and lack of local supporters.

### **C. Corruption**

Not long after re-establishing himself in Baghdad, Chalabi found that the part of his past that first made him an attractive asset to the CIA had come back to haunt him: allegations of corruption. Contrary to how Chalabi and the INC had tried to portray themselves to the U.S. government and media, the fact of the matter was that Chalabi had no domestic base in Iraq. While many people, at least in Baghdad, had heard of Chalabi

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<sup>197</sup> Hill, “Plans for Addressing the De-Ba’athification Issue,” WikiLeaks, 10BAGHDAD113, January 17, 2010. Accessed April 4, 2014. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/01/10BAGHDAD113.html>.

<sup>198</sup> Ahmad Chalabi, “America and the Future of Iraq,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 5, 2010, A21.

and were familiar with his family's history, they were wary of the man who had been absent from Iraq's struggle for nearly forty-five years. This wariness was compounded by the fraud conviction in Jordan during his tenure as Petra Bank CEO at a time when Iraqis were looking for politicians they could trust after the government disappeared overnight. However, the accusations of the past proved to be unshakeable and would impede not only Chalabi's ability to rise through the ranks of the new Iraqi political system, but also strain relations with one of Iraq's critical neighbors.

The fraud conviction proved to have the strongest and most lasting impact on Chalabi as a political operator. Not only did it effect how he was perceived by the Iraqi population in general, but his rise to power in light of the conviction irked Iraq's neighbor to the west. Early on, the Jordanian government expressed its willingness to work with the IGC, with the exception of one noted member – Ahmad Chalabi. After the IGC was replaced by the Iraqi Interim Government in 2004, Jordanian officials confided to the U.S. government “that Ahmad Chalabi is not an IIG member, positively affects the IIG's image in Jordan.”<sup>199</sup> During this period Chalabi continued to fight the conviction as he had in the past, claiming that the charges were a politically motivated result of his work to undermine Saddam Hussein from Amman in the 1980s. But his campaign against the Jordanian government was not limited to denying the legitimacy of the charges, as he repeatedly accused Jordan of working to undermine the new government, even going so far as bussing

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<sup>199</sup> Gnehm, “Scene Setter for King Abdullah's Visit to U.S. (June 8-16),” WikiLeaks, 04AMMAN4667, June 8, 2004, accessed February 23, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2004/06/04AMMAN4667.html>.

in protestors to demonstrate in front of the Jordanian embassy.<sup>200</sup> The antipathy Chalabi felt toward the Jordanians surfaced in ways obvious to observers. U.S. officials noted his bitterness over the conviction as part of the motivation for suggesting to re-route grain imports through the Basra port, thereby cutting out the need to ship the imports via land over the Jordanian border.<sup>201</sup> Even as the Jordanian government eased its stance on Chalabi and offered to work with him, Chalabi would come to demand nothing less than an official pronouncement of his innocence which the Jordanians refused to supply. Chalabi went as far as to refuse a pardon from King Abdullah II in May 2005, arguing that by accepting it he would be admitting his guilt and he wished to clear his name through a trial. But a falling out between Chalabi and the U.S. in the spring of 2004 was perhaps a reason why the Jordanian government quickly became more resistant to accepting Chalabi's terms. Chalabi had lost the support of anyone in the U.S. government who would be able to defend him and had to rely solely on his own efforts. Yet even without U.S. support, Chalabi could still be a major nuisance to Jordan as he was independently wealthy and able to pay to make his positions heard. With Iraqi elections scheduled for December 2005, Jordan was thrown into the spotlight as Chalabi attempted to downplay his conviction and spin it so that he was the victim.

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<sup>200</sup> Hale, "Update on Current Jordan-Iraq Relations," WikiLeaks, 05AMMAN6689, August 18, 2005, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2005/08/05AMMAN6689.html>.

<sup>201</sup> Khalilzad, "Iraq – Ambassador Discusses the IMF, Constitution, and Security Issues with DPM Chalabi," WikiLeaks, 05BAGHDAD4204, October 12, 2005, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2005/10/05BAGHDAD4204.html>.

Things became more complicated when in 2005 Chalabi filed a lawsuit against the Jordanian government in federal court in Washington D.C., claiming defamation as result of his Petra Bank conviction, and accusing the Jordanians of having informed the U.S. that he spied for Iran.<sup>202</sup> Naturally, the Jordanians openly viewed the suit as damaging and counterproductive, noting at the time that “the Royal Court was actively working to resolve his dispute with Jordan”<sup>203</sup> in order for the two parties to move forward in cooperation. But what irked the Jordanians in addition to the suit, was the U.S. State Department’s refusal to issue a statement of interest in their favor. By issuing a statement of interest in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Justice, the State Department would essentially be communicating that it does not stand by Chalabi in his actions or accusations. Between 2005 and 2008, the Jordanian government made five requests for a statement of interest from the U.S. State Department, the last of which was made on April 17, 2008. The State Department claimed that there was no need to issue a statement of interest due to the Jordanian government’s likely victory in the case. Yet, the unwillingness of the U.S. to aid a strategic ally both of the U.S. and Iraq, and in light of the recognition that “Chalabi is attempting to utilize this lawsuit for political ends and political propaganda”,<sup>204</sup> provided an unnecessary hurdle in Iraqi-Jordanian relations. However, the

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<sup>202</sup> Hale, “GOJ Request for ‘Statement of Interest’ in U.S. Court Case Brought by Ahmad Chalabi,” WikiLeaks, 05AMMAN6118, July 31, 2005, accessed on March 1, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2005/07/05AMMAN6118.html>.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

lawsuit was eventually dismissed in August 2007, but Chalabi appealed, and the courts ultimately ruled against him on October 24, 2008.<sup>205</sup>

Charges of corruption against Ahmad Chalabi went beyond events that transpired a decade and a half before the second invasion of Iraq, however. As early as November 2003 Chalabi was implicated in the press on charges of corruption involving awarding government reconstruction contracts to friends.<sup>206</sup> The main recipients of these contracts were the companies Nour USA Ltd. and Erinys International, both owned by longtime friends of Ahmad Chalabi; the latter's own nephew, Salem Chalabi, served as "counsel" for Erinys.<sup>207</sup> Erinys won a lucrative two year, USD 80 million contract in late 2003 to guard over four thousand miles of oil pipeline stretching throughout Iraq. It was reported that the company recruited its more than six thousand member force largely from the Free Iraqi Forces, the militia tied to the INC. These allegations were confirmed by the director of the company, Faisal Daghistani.<sup>208</sup> Nour USA, a young company whose owner financed the founding of Erinys International, received a USD 327 million contract to

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<sup>205</sup> *Chalabi v. Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*, United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, October 24, 2008, Print.

<sup>206</sup> Rod Hirsh Nordland, "The \$87 Billion Money Pit: It's the Boldest Reconstruction Project since the Marshall Plan. and We Cannot Afford to Fail. but Where Are the Billions Really Going?" *Newsweek*, November 3, 2003, accessed November 20, 2015, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-109357992.html?>

<sup>207</sup> Knut Royce, "Start-Up Company with Connections / U.S. Gives \$400 Million in Work to Contractor with Ties to Pentagon Favorite on Iraqi Governing Council," *Newsday*, February 15, 2004, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/279787458?accountid=8555>.

<sup>208</sup> Nicholas Pelham, "Rival Former Exile Groups Clash Over Security in Iraq," *The Financial Times*, December 12, 2003, accessed February 27, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/249519617?accountid=8555>.

outfit the Iraqi army, in addition to being attached to the Erinys contract as a “joint venture partner.”<sup>209</sup> The company won the contract with a bid so low that many veteran companies also vying for the bid cried foul. Although the U.S. army denied claims of favoritism as the real cause of this debacle, in March 2004 they officially canceled the contract with plans to open it up for rebidding, citing confusion in the wording of the contract and unclear terms of reference.<sup>210</sup>

During the period of 2003-2005, it appears that Chalabi was aggressively utilizing his positions on the IGC and ITG to maximize his appeal as a patron. Through his position on the IGC, Chalabi oversaw the 2003 appointment of the Minister of Oil, Ibrahim Bahr al-Ulum, who replaced the then head of the State Oil Marketing Organization (SOMO) after the latter had caused offense by “failing to award two crude lifting contracts as directed by a Chalabi associate.”<sup>211</sup> U.S. embassy officials later noted in an observation about the Fadhila Party’s attempts to pressure SOMO into awarding contracts to party allies that “Chalabi himself has often been accused of graft and corruption, including doing from October 2003 through May 2004 exactly what he said Fadhila is doing” (manipulating oil

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<sup>209</sup> Royce, “Start-Up Company with Connections.”

<sup>210</sup> Mary Pat Flaherty, “Va. Company Protests Army’s Cancellation of Iraq Contract” *The Washington Post*, March 16, 2004, accessed February 27, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/409660211?accountid=8555>.

<sup>211</sup> Khalilzad, “Corruption in the Iraqi Oil Ministry Favors Fadhila Party Shaykh; Forces SOMO Director Out – For Now,” WikiLeaks, 06BAGHDAD750, March 9, 2006, accessed March 29, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/03/06BAGHDAD750.html>.



contracts for the monetary benefit of his party).<sup>212</sup> Yet despite all the reports of institutional, contractual, and financial corruption, Chalabi still managed to secure for himself a place in the interim government. After being appointed Deputy Prime Minister of the ITG under Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jafari in 2005, Chalabi went on to chair the ITG Contracting Committee, which had the responsibility of vetting government contracts amounting to over USD 2 million, later changed to USD 3 million. Chalabi retained this appointment in spite of the fact that many of his Iraqi counterparts were hesitant to make him a minister in the future government due to the vast allegations of corruption.<sup>213</sup> In a meeting with U.S. embassy officials he claimed, ironically, to have eliminated 90 per cent of contractual corruption and boasted about the air of “fear” his committee had created amongst the ministries.<sup>214</sup>

The most important appointment he oversaw, however, if the allegations of embezzlement are true, was that of the head of the Trade Bank of Iraq (TBI). Hussein al-Uzri, Chalabi’s nephew, chaired the bank “which regulates Iraq’s international trade and funds reconstruction”<sup>215</sup> operations from its creation under the CPA in 2003 until his

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<sup>212</sup> Khalilzad, “DPM Chalabi on Oil Ministry Corruption and Kurdish “Safe Haven” Comments,” WikiLeaks, 06BAGHDAD495, February 16, 2006, accessed March 28, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/02/06BAGHDAD495.html>.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Satterfield, “Zelikow-Chalabi Discussion: Government Priorities and Major Hurdles,” WikiLeaks, 06BAGHDAD917, March 20, 2006, accessed March 29, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/03/06BAGHDAD917.html>.

<sup>215</sup> Omar Al-Shaher, “Iraq's Central Bank a Political Battleground,” *Al-Monitor*, January 2, 2013, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/01/hardships-iraq-central-bank.html>.

dismissal in 2011 on corruption charges. Under al-Uzri's direction, it was claimed that Chalabi received "up to 1.5 percent of every transaction",<sup>216</sup> which is no small amount given the fact that the TBI handled both U.S. government funds and letters of credit for Iraqi ministries. U.S. officials were apparently aware of the connection and dealings between the two, but recognized that "inferences do not amount to proof"<sup>217</sup> of corruption. Yet charges of familial favoritism are hard to deny, especially when in 2008 the TBI "gave al-Bilad Islamic Bank run by al-Uzri's father a USD 100 million letter of credit reissuance deal for the Iraq government."<sup>218</sup>

Al-Uzri fled to Lebanon in 2011 after the Iraqi government opened an investigation into his practices at the TBI. The indictment aroused suspicion that Prime Minister Nuri al-Malaki was attempting to consolidate power, though al-Malaki quickly denied these allegations. The move was also linked to a deal with South Korean company STX Heavy Industries to provide power in Iraq, to which al-Uzri refused to issue a letter of credit. After al-Uzri was dismissed and fled, the deal was approved with STX being awarded two new contracts for oil related projects in 2014. However, as the investigation has yet to commence, it is unlikely that any evidence of mismanagement under al-Uzri will come to light.

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<sup>216</sup> Richard Bonin, *Arrows of the Night: Ahmad Chalabi's Long Journey to Triumph in Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 232.

<sup>217</sup> Aram Roston, "Banking on Chalabi," *The Nation*, April 15, 2010, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://www.thenation.com/article/banking-chalabi/>.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

U.S. embassy cables illustrate that officials recognized Chalabi's competence as an administrator, and given the dearth of these qualities in Iraq, tolerated his actions despite his history of fraud and corruption. But his utility as an administrator would not last long, as an embassy cable revealed Chalabi was appointed to the positions of Finance Minister and Energy Czar because they were "regarded as something of a 'poison pill.' In other words, the problems of meeting the energy crisis [of 2006] are seen as so daunting that his inevitable failure would have a personal political impact welcomed by many."<sup>219</sup>

Chalabi's unpopularity within the Iraqi government had grown to such an extent that members were putting him in positions likely to limit his effectiveness, and therefore reduce the chances he would be appointed to a prominent position in the future. Members of the Iraqi Council of Representatives also revealed to U.S. officials that a new law drafted by Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih's staff for serving on the National Investment Commission restricted from service anyone "sentenced for a felony or misdemeanor 'of moral turpitude' or have declared bankruptcy."<sup>220</sup> This was apparently designed "to prevent former DPM Ahmad Chalabi from serving on the board of the National Investment Commission."<sup>221</sup> Such aggressive maneuvering by rival Iraqi politicians further reduced the value Chalabi possessed as a political asset.

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<sup>219</sup> Satterfield, "Zelikow-Chalabi Discussion: Government Priorities and Major Hurdles."

<sup>220</sup> Khalilzad, "GOI Passes Investment Law," WikiLeaks, 06BAGHDAD3797, October 12, 2006, accessed March 29, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/10/06BAGHDAD3797.html>.

<sup>221</sup> Khalilzad, "Ambassador Discusses De-Baathification and Other Topics with Ahmet Chalabi," WikiLeaks, 06BAGHDAD3725, October 7, 2006, accessed March 29, 2006, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/10/06BAGHDAD3725.html>.

## D. Iran

For those in the United States government involved in overseeing the operations of Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress, his relationship with Iran was an established fact. Chalabi himself claims to have worked with Iran in opposition to Saddam Hussein while the last Shah still reigned, and continued to do so throughout the 1990s.<sup>222</sup> For his allies in the U.S., Chalabi's professed democratic vision for Iraq was enough to allay any concerns they may have had about his ties to Iran. During the INC's first venture into Kurdistan, Chalabi had regular contact with members of Iran's intelligence apparatus. This included the infamous instance where he intentionally left a note forged to look like a U.S. National Security Council document on a table for Iranian agents to read. By "leaking" this letter of what would have appeared to be U.S. support and approval of Chalabi's upcoming attempted uprising to the Iranians, Chalabi hoped to gain Iranian support.<sup>223</sup> In addition, Chalabi used money provided under the *Iraq Liberation Act* to set up an office for the INC in Tehran. None of this was secret, with the exception of the forged letter, with which Chalabi still denies involvement. During the occupation Chalabi even "openly acknowledged his relations with senior Iranian officials in meetings with Emboffs."<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Hale, "Shiite Insider Discusses Iraqi Political Relationships, Suggests Outreach to Sistani," WikiLeaks, 06AMMAN1289, February 22, 2006, accessed March 28, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/02/06AMMAN1289.html>.

<sup>223</sup> Jane Mayer, "The Manipulator," *The New Yorker*, June 7, 2004, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/06/07/the-manipulator>.

<sup>224</sup> Hill, "Coalition Profile: the Iraqi National Alliance," WikiLeaks, 10BAGHDAD537, February 28, 2010, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/02/10BAGHDAD537.html>.

More so, prior to the invasion Chalabi flew to Tehran to reassure the Iranians that the U.S. was not using the invasion of Iraq as a pretext for launching strikes into Iran. He also apparently negotiated the placement of “a U.S.-financed transmitter to be installed on Iranian territory, broadcasting into Iraq.”<sup>225</sup> Still, intelligence officials who were active at the time speculated that Chalabi might have been an Iranian double agent, or at least what is referred to as an “agent of influence”, meaning that he was too volatile or untrustworthy to control, but still provided useful information to Iran.<sup>226</sup>

Yet Chalabi’s key aid, a Shi’i Kurd named Aras Habib Karim, was suspected of being a full-fledged Iranian agent, a disastrous implication given the U.S. funding that he had access to as well as the sensitive information that he came into contact with. But Karim was not alone in his role as an Iranian tool. Famously, on the very eve of the invasion Chalabi and his Free Iraqi Forces were supposed to be flown into Iraq on a U.S. military transport. The commanding officer became enraged to find out that many of the fighters were Iranian affiliated militiamen, and that most could not even speak Arabic.<sup>227</sup> However, an even more infamous, and much more controversial, incident involving Chalabi’s relationship with Iran occurred on May 20, 2004. U.S. intelligence services had picked up traffic that Chalabi had reported to Iranian intelligence that the United States had broken the code with which the Iranians encrypted their messages. The implications for

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<sup>225</sup> “Ahmad Chalabi and His Iranian Connection,” *Stratfor Global Intelligence*, February 18, 2004, accessed October 11, 2015, [https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/ahmad\\_chalabi\\_and\\_his\\_iranian\\_connection](https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/ahmad_chalabi_and_his_iranian_connection).

<sup>226</sup> Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 243.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

such an action were huge. At this point the INC was still receiving U.S. funds, and while doing so was allegedly feeding sensitive information to the very nation it believed to be fueling the ongoing insurgency in Iraq. The backlash was swift and brutal. Chalabi's compound was raided in a joint U.S.-Iraqi operation, with numerous documents and computers being seized at the scene. It was said that there would be a federal investigation into any wrongdoing, but to this day there has been no word on any charges or proceedings that would delve into the matter. Reports surfaced that even Chalabi himself was not questioned in relation to the charges. However, as result of the incident all funding was cut off to the INC on May 19, 2004.<sup>228</sup>

Chalabi slowly made his way back into a working relationship with the U.S., and he found himself occupying numerous positions that carried with them a decent amount of prestige. But in late March 2008, Chalabi saw an opportunity to make a major power move within in the government, and encouraged the attempted ouster of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki when Moqtada al-Sadr's group, the Jaysh al-Mahdi, launched a bout of shelling on the Green Zone. In attempting to create an air of incompetence and instability under al-Maliki, the JAM hoped it could force a vote of no confidence and see him removed from the premiership. At this point it seems that Chalabi encouraged al-Sadr in his efforts, hoping that Tehran would be able to replace al-Maliki with his deputy, Adel

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<sup>228</sup> Richard A. Oppel Jr., "The Struggle for Iraq: Alliances; U.S. to Halt Payments to Iraqi Group Headed by a Onetime Pentagon Favorite," *The New York Times*, May 18, 2004, accessed January 22, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/18/world/struggle-for-iraq-alliances-us-halt-payments-iraqi-group-headed-onetime-pentagon.html>.

‘Abd al-Mehdi of SCIRI, and ensure a prominent place in the government for himself.<sup>229</sup>

The INC office had become aware of Tehran’s growing discontentment with al-Maliki the year before, as well as its plan to attempt to force al-Maliki from office.<sup>230</sup>

What may seem like bold or even foolhardy moves were in fact carefully measured calculations. Chalabi had a history of political cooperation with the Sadrists as early as 2004, and continued to use his group to strengthen Shi‘i support for the INC.<sup>231</sup> An early example of this cooperation manifested itself in the run up to the 2005 elections, in which Chalabi courted Moqtada al-Sadr to enter into a political alliance after deciding to leave the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA).<sup>232</sup> After being appointed Deputy Prime Minister in 2005, Chalabi also attempted to orchestrate “the release of hundreds of al-Sadr followers in U.S. detention and...rescinding the arrest warrant [for the murder of ‘Abd al-Majid al-Khoei].”<sup>233</sup> Also, at a 2005 rally in Sadr City commemorating the death of Muhammad

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<sup>229</sup> Speckhard, “Ja’afari’s Farewell: Parting is such Sweet Sorrow,” WikiLeaks, 07BAGHDAD1526, May 11, 2006, accessed March 29, 2006, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/05/07BAGHDAD1526.html>.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Alissa J. Rubin, “Much-Maligned Chalabi Forges Ties with al-Sadr and Re-emerges as a Force,” *The Los Angeles Times*, August 1, 2004.

<sup>232</sup> Satterfield, “TNA Member Qasim Daoud on Constitution, and Possible Breakup of United Iraqi Alliance,” WikiLeaks, 05BAGHDAD2805, July 3, 2005, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2005/07/05BAGHDAD2805.html>.

<sup>233</sup> “Al-Sadr: Political process legitimizes ‘occupation’; The radical Shiite cleric says he will not interfere with Iraqi government,” *Associated Press*, June 5, 2005.

Sadiq al-Sadr, Chalabi referred to the attendees as “his Sadrist brothers.”<sup>234</sup> That same year, then Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafaari appointed Chalabi as a liaison with the JAM to explain an engagement program targeting armed groups in Baghdad due to their prior relationship. The INC would also join the Shi’a Political Assembly in 2008, and the predominantly Shi’i Iraqi National Alliance (INA), in both of which the Sadrists were members.

However, to quell the coup attempt al-Maliki quickly dispatched U.S.-backed Iraqi army units to Basra, and after nearly a week of bombing and fighting a ceasefire was called, officially ending al-Sadr’s campaign. Chalabi’s role in the incident was apparently known throughout the American and Iraqi governments. In a U.S. embassy cable, Speaker of the Council of Representatives Mahmoud al-Mashadani accused Chalabi of “‘looking for his lost glory’ by siding with the Sadrists.”<sup>235</sup> The following month when Chalabi offered to travel to Basra to help implement humanitarian assistance to the residents of the city, U.S. officials recommended Chalabi be monitored by someone from the Prime Minister’s office, calling it “a very good idea.”<sup>236</sup> While members of both the U.S. and Iraqi governments were aware of Chalabi’s role and were beginning to cut Chalabi off

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<sup>234</sup> Khalilzad, “What Campaigning in Iraq Looks Like,” WikiLeaks, 05BAGHDAD4912, December 8, 2015, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2005/12/05BAGHDAD4912.html>.

<sup>235</sup> Crocker, “The Ambassador’s March 29 Meetings With Mashadani, Attiya and Rikabi,” WikiLeaks, 08BAGHDAD977, March 30, 2008, accessed April 8, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/03/08BAGHDAD977.html>.

<sup>236</sup> Crocker, “MCNS on March 30 Reviews Basrah, Baghdad, Ninewa Security Operations,” WikiLeaks, 08BAGHDAD1019, April 2, 2008, accessed April 8, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/04/08BAGHDAD1019.html>.



from the government, he continued to try and spin the events in his favor. In a conversation with U.S. embassy officials, Chalabi laid blame for the attacks on the Green Zone on coalition airstrikes in Basra, claiming that he had negotiated a ceasefire and would act as an interlocutor with Iran to cease its rocket attacks from Sadr City.<sup>237</sup>

Yet, Chalabi would not see the full impact of his participation in the March siege until May, when over the course of several meetings Nuri al-Maliki announced that Chalabi would be barred from attending the Internal Executive Steering Committee (IESC) meetings, and would be removed from the Iraqi Services Committee, which he chaired.<sup>238</sup> Al-Maliki stated that Chalabi had been removed because he “had accomplished nothing with his committee except develop a powerbase for the next election” and cited his increasingly close relationship with the JAM, which he used as personal security.<sup>239</sup> General David Petraeus, then Commanding General of the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), added during the meeting that “Chalabi works directly with BG Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Qods force.”

This would not be the last time Chalabi was accused of or perceived as doing Tehran’s bidding within Iraq. A common tactic by Chalabi’s political opponents to discredit him was to highlight his relationship with Iran in meetings with U.S. embassy

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<sup>237</sup> Butenis, “Stuck Between an Arrogant Man and a Mad Man,” WikiLeaks, 08BAGHDAD1043, April 5, 2008, accessed April 8 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/04/08BAGHDAD1043.html>.

<sup>238</sup> Crocker, “Maliki Demands Halt to Iranian and Syrian Interference,” WikiLeaks, 08BAGHDAD1483, May 12, 2008, accessed April 8, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/05/08BAGHDAD1483.html>.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

officials. Qasim Daoud, a prominent Shi'ite politician, ranked Chalabi as receiving the third most political support from the Iranians after SCIRI and Da'wa.<sup>240</sup> In 2010, Ayad Allawi, Chalabi's cousin and leader of the Iraqi National Accord, accused Chalabi of manipulating his relationship with Washington D.C. to benefit Iran, to whom he claimed Chalabi was "married."<sup>241</sup> Allawi also accused Chalabi of introducing then Defense Minister Dulaimi to Iranian intelligence.<sup>242</sup> Likewise, Mahmoud al-Mashadani had earlier claimed "[Chalabi] has two faces, one with you and one with Iran," and his former ally Massoud Barzani considered Chalabi "Iran's main agent."<sup>243</sup>

The U.S. embassy noted that Chalabi's limited popularity among Iraqi voters had driven him further toward Tehran in search of a new patron.<sup>244</sup> At times Chalabi's support for the Iranians directly countered U.S. policy, such as his "advocating Iranian assistance

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<sup>240</sup> Satterfield, "TNA Member Qasim Daoud on Constitution, and Possible Breakup of United Iraqi Alliance," WikiLeaks, 05BAGHDAD2805, July 3, 2005, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2005/07/05BAGHDAD2805.html>.

<sup>241</sup> Hill, "Coalition Profile: the Iraqi National Alliance."

<sup>242</sup> Sison, "MBZ on Iraq, Iran, Pakistan," WikiLeaks, 05ABUDHABI2178, May 16, 2005, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2005/05/05ABUDHABI2178.html>.

<sup>243</sup> Khalilzad, "Key Sunni Leader Envisions a Unity Government – Including Shia Islamists," WikiLeaks, 05BAGHDAD4959, December 12, 2005, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2005/12/05BAGHDAD4959.html>.; Crocker, "Barzani Discusses De-B'athification, Hydrocarbons, Turkey, Iran with Ambassador," 07BAGHDAD1349, April 19, 2007, accessed April 7, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/04/07BAGHDAD1349.html>.

<sup>244</sup> Hill, "Chalabi Offers Views on Improving Iraq's Economy, the INA's Platform of Good Governance," WikiLeaks, 09BAGHDAD2704, October 7, 2009, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/10/09BAGHDAD2704.html>.

to defeat the Ba'athist-driven insurgency.”<sup>245</sup> Yet, even Tehran kept Chalabi at arms' length, unsure of how much they could control him or where his true loyalties lay. However, Chalabi did not cease from acting in ways that reflected Tehran's interests in order to “curry favor.” This was especially evident with the application of the AJC's role in attempting to disqualify candidates in the run-up to the 2010 elections.<sup>246</sup> Many inside Iraq viewed the attempted disqualification of largely Sunni and anti-Iranian candidates as an attempt to gain Iran's favor.<sup>247</sup> While staunch Iranian allies Ahmad Chalabi and Ali Faisal al-Lami were indeed leading the charge, the U.S. embassy saw no direct evidence that the men were acting at the behest of Tehran, merely that they were acting in order to get into Tehran's good graces.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Satterfield, “Navigating the Rift Between the U.S. and Iran – Rubaie on the UIA,S Balancing Act,” WikiLeaks, 05BAGHDAD3001, July 19, 2005, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2005/07/05BAGHDAD3001.html>.

<sup>246</sup> The Accountability and Justice Commission was created in an attempt to reform the HNDC in 2008. However, following an October 2009 Iraqi Supreme Court ruling in favor of HNDC executive director Ali Faisal al-Lami, the HNDC was allowed to assume the name and role of the AJC, effectively hampering any real chance at reform. A key difference between the two is that unlike the HNDC, the AJC had no sunset clause built in, allowing it to continue the de- Ba'athification process indefinitely. And because the newly formed AJC was allowed to keep the personnel working under what was the HNDC, Ahmad Chalabi retained his position of chairman.

<sup>247</sup> Hill, “Plans for Addressing the De-Ba'athification Issue,” WikiLeaks, 10BAGHDAD113, January 17, 2010, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/01/10BAGHDAD113.html>.; Hill, “MP Mutlaq to Appeal Election Bar; Seeks USG, International Intervention,” WikiLeaks, 10BAGHDAD110, January 16, 2010, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/01/10BAGHDAD110.html>.

<sup>248</sup> Hill, “The De-Ba'athification Controversy: Sectarianism, Consensus Politics, and Iraqi Democracy,” WikiLeaks, 10BAGHDAD266, February 1, 2010, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/02/10BAGHDsAD266.html>.

## **E. The U.S.-Chalabi Rift**

In May 2005 Chalabi was appointed as deputy prime minister, as well as heading the Supreme Contract Committee, after losing the bid for the premiership of the Iraqi Interim Government to Ibrahim al-Jafari. Even this pyrrhic victory, however, was short lived, for when elections for a permanent Iraqi government were held in late 2005, Chalabi received less than 1 per cent of the votes cast – not enough for a single seat in parliament. Chalabi retained his position of deputy prime minister into 2006, tasked largely with overseeing the energy and infrastructure ministries. These responsibilities put Chalabi in constant contact with members of the United States government who often attended committee meetings and held audiences for government ministers. The irony of the situation was all too clear as the U.S. had blacklisted Chalabi on espionage charges less than two years before. However, as a representative of the Iraqi government, the U.S. could not reasonably refuse to interact with Chalabi as long as it was in a professional and appropriate capacity. Yet, given the extremely limited amount of time between the espionage accusations and renewed contact with the United States government, it is surprising to see appraisals of Chalabi as such in a January 14, 2006 meeting with U.S. officials: “If Chalabi has an influential place in the new government and can sustain his initiatives, we may see substantive reforms across several sectors of the Iraqi economy in 2006.”<sup>249</sup> Or in a February 7, 2006 meeting where it was expressed that “the U.S. is eager to work with Chalabi as an effective GOI interlocutor to achieve our shared goals in the

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<sup>249</sup> Khalilzad, “DPM Chalabi on Agriculture and Food Distribution System Reform,” WikiLeaks, 06BAGHDAD241, January 28, 2006, accessed March 28, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/01/06BAGHDAD241.html>.

energy sector.”<sup>250</sup> Members of U.S. embassy staff openly acknowledged Chalabi’s ability to thrive as a “survivor”, though none of the positive appraisals signaled a change in U.S. willingness to support Chalabi in anything other than economic reform and infrastructure development.

Despite any feelings of wariness that the U.S. may have held toward Chalabi, it appeared as though he was actively trying to get back into their good graces. On multiple occasions in 2006 and 2007, Chalabi advised U.S. embassy employees on how to manipulate fractures in the Sadrist camp, whom he was currently allied with, as well as urging them to publicize evidence of Iranian meddling in order highlight their negative role in Iraq. In a February 22, 2006 U.S. embassy interview with long-time Chalabi associate, and former INC human rights coordinator, Ghanem Jawad, he asserts that Chalabi wanted to be appointed Energy Czar in order “to recapture the confidence of the USG, and develop a new ‘pro-Chalabi’ lobby in the U.S. based on support from major oil companies.”<sup>251</sup> Yet, despite no great lack of will and energy, no such lobby would emerge.

As Chalabi attempted to maximize his usefulness in the eyes of both the United States government and the Iraqi government, he inevitably came to act too aggressively. Indeed, in the latter half of 2006 Chalabi no longer had his position of deputy prime minister and was left only with his position with the HNDC. However, in early 2007 he

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<sup>250</sup> Khalilzad, “Chalabi Bullish on Fuel Pricing, Downcast on Export Potential,” WikiLeaks, 06BAGHDAD359, February 7, 2006, accessed March 28, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/02/06BAGHDAD359.html>.

<sup>251</sup> Hale, “Shiite Insider Discusses Iraqi Political Relationships, Suggests Outreach to Sistani,” WikiLeaks, 06AMMAN1289, February 22, 2006, accessed March 28, 2014, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/02/06AMMAN1289.html>.

was appointed part of the Baghdad Security Plan tasked with popular mobilization of communities which would help security services identify threats and assess communities' needs for services. He quickly faced criticism for appointing individuals loyal to himself as liaisons between himself and the committees, using HNDC staff to support the committees, as well as running all the meetings out of his home in Mansour.<sup>252</sup> Critics also alleged that the committees had turned into militias and a personal intelligence gathering service for Chalabi, which the U.S. embassy confirmed.<sup>253</sup> It was during this time that Chalabi attempted to broaden the authority of the HNDC, continued to meddle in the al-Dujayl Trial, and tighten restrictions on exemptions and pensions. Yet despite the muscle flexing display, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki appointed Chalabi as Minister of Communications and chairman of the Essential Services Committee, until Chalabi was again cast out of the inner circles of government following the attempted 2008 JAM-led ouster of Maliki.

After 2008 the political weight and prestige Chalabi carried on the Iraqi political scene was severely deprecated. With the exception of meddling in elections through the AJC, Chalabi had no real role in governance and was largely shut out of the political process. Meanwhile, Nuri al-Maliki was reelected to the premiership in 2010, and won enough votes in 2014 for a third term, but abdicated under internal and international

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<sup>252</sup> Khalilzad, "Chalabi Aid Says Incompetence, Lack of Budget Hinder Popular Committees Effort," WikiLeaks, 07BAGHDAD980, March 20, 2007. Accessed April 2, 2014. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/03/07BAGHDAD980.html>.

<sup>253</sup> Khalilzad, "Ambassador and PM: Neighbors Conference, Saudi Agenda, Kurdistan Trip," WikiLeaks, 07BAGHDAD831, March 8, 2007. Accessed April 2, 2014. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/03/07BAGHDAD831.html>.

pressure. Internal strife in the form of a failure to provide adequate power needs to the people of Iraq, economic woes, corruption and nepotism, the rising challenge of combating of the Islamic State, and accusations of sectarianism all contributed to Maliki's decision to step aside for a new prime minister. For a brief moment Ahmad Chalabi reemerged as a contender for this position as the sole candidate nominated by the National Alliance, a coalition which included Sadrist parties.<sup>254</sup> He received vocal support from sitting politicians, some of who were quick to add they did not like Chalabi, but thought him capable.<sup>255</sup> Again, this position would elude Ahmad Chalabi however, when on August 11, 2014 former Minister of Communications and deputy speaker of parliament, Haider al-Abadi was elected prime minister.<sup>256</sup>

## **F. Conclusion**

Once in Iraq Chalabi began to pursue a truly aggressive and personal strategy for implementing his vision of Iraq. Even as his Petra Bank conviction was broadcast in the global press, he engaged in practices of political and financial corruption aimed at solidifying himself as a prominent fixture in Iraq. In an attempt to reclaim his family's prior status, he appointed numerous family members and friends to government ministries

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<sup>254</sup> "Iraq's Al-Sadr Trend, Supreme Islamic Council inclined to name Chalabi for PM," *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, July 15, 2014.

<sup>255</sup> Martin Chulov and Spencer Ackerman, "Ahmad Chalabi: from pariah to Iraq's next prime minister?" *The Guardian*, July 6, 2014.

<sup>256</sup> Adam Taylor "Meet Haider al-Abadi, the man named Iraq's new prime minister," *The Washington Post*, August 11, 2014.

while participating in various early Iraqi governing bodies. More critically, his application of the de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification program disproportionately targeted Sunni segments of society with little regard for the context of individual membership, creating unnecessary tensions in an already unstable environment. Though the framework and authority for the program was supplied by the United States, after the dismissal of the Iraqi armed forces the gross and continued misapplication came at the hands of Chalabi. As pointed out above, on multiple occasions not only did he attempt to influence elections in his favor, but he also attempted to interfere in judicial proceedings, an arena in which the HNDC had no authority. By using the program in such a way, Chalabi contradicted his prior assertions that his aim was to forge a unified, democratic Iraq devoid of sectarian and ethnic tensions.

Over time Chalabi illustrated that he was only interested in an alliance with the United States in as far as it secured an Iraq free of Saddam Hussein. Through the U.S. mandated de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification Committee and various governing councils, Chalabi was able to operate for a period with the stamp of legitimate authority. But once it became clear that the United States was not simply handing over the keys to Chalabi, he rebelled. This is especially evident in his interactions with Iran and Moqtada al-Sadr. Where he saw a lack of complete support from the United States Chalabi sought to supplement this with the military might and intimidation of the Jaysh al-Mahdi, and the strong, yet shadowy political influence of Iran. He pursued this angle while at the same time advising the U.S. against al-Sadr and Iran, attempting to play both parties off one another. This was despite that fact that the U.S. had spent hundreds of millions of dollars funding the INC in an effort to jointly undermine Saddam Hussein.



Even though Chalabi maintained the support of many influential Bush administration figures in Washington, his ability to utilize that support was limited in their authority in Iraq. The greatest success in this area is that of the aforementioned de-Ba'athification program, which was handed down by Douglas Feith. But U.S. military commanders had little interest or patience with Chalabi, and were ultimately the ones who made decisions in Iraq during the occupation; that and his enemies in the State Department. Where Chalabi could rely on his influential allies in the lead up to war, he suffered in the political system he helped create in Iraq. He was unable to translate that support into political clout in Baghdad, where he became largely despised by his fellow politicians and remained wildly unpopular to voting Iraqis. Yet he was unable to maintain prominence in Iraq even as the U.S. recognized his usefulness as an effective administrator and was willing to work with him – up to a point – in light of his list of transgressions. It seemed as though his inability to successfully function in a democratic Iraq was as result of his utter disregard for the rules, naked ambition, and unwillingness to occupy a position lacking in influence.

## CONCLUSION

A significant part of the debate surrounding the U.S.-led adventure into Iraq has always been attempting to determine where to assign blame for its ultimate failure. Chalabi falls, unsurprisingly, into this debate because of his long, storied, and aggressive quest to reshape Iraq by any means necessary. But the more important questions are not the “who?” or the “why?”, but the “how?” That is what this piece ultimately tries to illuminate: the chain of events that contributed to the current state of Iraq by examining one prominent political relationship. The issue of who used or manipulated who in the lead up to the war cannot be ignored – nor should it be – as it is a part of the “how?”, but it is not the central theme of this thesis.

The quest to reclaim the Iraq of his past was an obsession for Ahmad, one to which he dedicated nearly his entire life. His sense of entitlement and destiny that was instilled in him as a young, privileged boy never disappeared over the duration of his exile. It is visible in the way he ran Petra Bank, in the way he dealt with the U.S. in the early and mid-nineties, in the stories he wove about his past and how he sold the Iraqi defectors to the media. He acted as if he were beholden to no man, system, or power structure, as if he could out maneuver every other player in the game. This should not come as a surprise, because despite being forced to leave behind vast holdings in land and business Chalabi had never known poverty, and only ever known power and prestige. He only ever attended private school as an adolescent and later two top-tier universities in the United States, his

intellect was by all accounts incredible; even outside of Iraq his family enjoyed prestige and name recognition and were afforded the friendship of many famous and powerful figures in the Middle East. Chalabi commanded extraordinary amounts of capital during his time at Petra Bank, doing as he pleased with the funds for nearly a decade. Even after his fall in Jordan he was approached by representatives from one of the most powerful nations in the world to pursue the removal of Saddam Hussein, giving him tens of millions of dollars and relatively little oversight in the process. Chalabi's ultimate goal was to return to a post-Ba<sup>c</sup>thist Iraq, but a remarkable set of opportunities and circumstances served to only feed his ambition and unrealistic expectations in exile.

Given the extreme amount of disagreement and infighting within the U.S. government over Ahmad Chalabi it is difficult to argue that he was a passive instrument of U.S. policy. More accurately, Chalabi can be described as a client, ally, or at times even a tool of conservative actors or factions within the U.S. political establishment, but not of the United States government as a whole. Individuals from both inside and outside the government comprised the network of support and influence that allowed Chalabi to successfully position his case for regime change in Iraq on the policy making agenda. Prominent conservative policy makers, former and current intelligence officials, think-tank members, journalists, and government officials all contributed to George W. Bush's decision to undertake the overthrow of the Ba<sup>c</sup>thist regime, a complex and sustained policy process in which Chalabi and the INC had a part. But despite the plethora of people who rallied around Chalabi's ideas, there is no indication that the official policy of the United States government in Iraq was to place Ahmad Chalabi in power. The lack of consensus in

Chalabi's standing with the U.S. is most evident in the conflicting appraisals of Chalabi from rival government officials. It is also evident in the kaleidoscopic nature of the policy making coalitions that supported him. As previously noted, less than two years after Chalabi was accused of spying for Iran in 2004, U.S. embassy officials expressed eagerness to work with Chalabi in matters of management and infrastructure. This contrasts with embassy criticisms of Chalabi's penchant for exaggeration, his self-serving interests, corruption, and clear political manipulation issued simultaneously.

The warning signs that Chalabi was out to pursue his own goals should have been apparent to U.S. officials from the beginning. Little more than four months after the CIA approached Chalabi to organize the Iraqi National Congress he moved the operation to Iraqi Kurdistan away from their direct control. As discussed earlier, his plans and actions expressly contravened with the policy and plans of both the CIA and the U.S. government for limited, indirect action against Saddam Hussein. Yet despite being well aware of this fact, Chalabi expanded the mission of the INC to include both a military and intelligence wing, something the CIA had not intended on nor authorized, and set in motion plans to foment a people's uprising in Iraq. Thus the attempted coup in 1996 was not supported or recommended by the U.S. government, despite what Chalabi tried to convey to his allies. Chalabi's actions were so far outside the limits of what the government would allow that the INC was cut off from both the CIA and federal funds in 1997, due to a "breakdown in trust."<sup>257</sup> At this point Chalabi's worth as a client was entirely negated by the fact that he

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<sup>257</sup> Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Report on the Use by the Intelligence Community of Information Provided by the Iraqi National Congress*, 109th Cong., 2d sess., 2006, 25.

could not be trusted, let alone influenced or controlled. In fact, the risks associated with continued sponsoring of Chalabi and the INC would have produced a negative effect on U.S. policy goals had Chalabi's original plans succeeded at the time. The result Chalabi was attempting to engineer would have forced the U.S. to engage Iraq in war at the behest or as a result of the actions of the INC.

To determine the amount of actual influence Chalabi wielded in Washington D.C. prior to the 2003 invasion, it is necessary to consider several factors. First, Chalabi took advantage of political currents that existed in the United States independent of his presence or actions. Since the end of the first Gulf War it had been U.S. policy to undermine Saddam Hussein with varying degrees of intensity and commitment; the end goal being replacing him with a more palatable ruler. These policy objectives merely overlapped with those of Ahmad Chalabi who seized upon the increasingly hawkish political currents that emerged in the U.S. as a result of Saddam Hussein's durability and apparent intransigence in the face of international weapons inspections. Second, though his presence was quite visible through the actions and words of his allies, Chalabi was not an American politician, much less a Congressional lawmaker, and could not have achieved the legislative victories he did without some degree of support within the government. Chalabi and his allies launched an effective, influential, and well-funded campaign that achieved legitimate legislative victories. Where Chalabi's tactics diverged from the mainstream was in his unscrupulous dissemination of the information supplied by his hand picked Iraqi defectors. Third, though Chalabi did enjoy the support of numerous powerful allies within the U.S. policy making establishment, there was strong opposition to him from both the CIA and

State Department. It was only with the increased prestige of the Neo-Cons – many of them allies or long term acquaintances of Chalabi – brought about by the election of George W. Bush, and after the shift in U.S. public opinion as a result of the 9/11 attacks, that the drift to war in Iraq gained real momentum.

Chalabi's ultimate utility was that he provided a conduit through which the neoconservative movement could claim to be working for a new, democratic Iraq. He acted as the counterweight to the more reluctant and cautious "silver bullet" strategy of the CIA. By following the course that the CIA had advocated for, the Neo-Cons could not have executed their idea of a more muscular, assertive foreign policy scheme in which the American military could be applied as a conventional instrument of political change. The presence of Chalabi allowed for the issue to assume a more urgent, humanitarian appearance. No longer would the American public have to be sold on war merely through reports of Saddam Hussein's refusal of U.N. weapons inspections, but the continual cry and assertions that there was an entire populace in need of American assistance was an invaluable tool for mobilization.

For Chalabi, the U.S. possessed everything he could not command or acquire as an ordinary person: seemingly unlimited funding, political clout, a modern military, and the ability to wield those resources without fear of retribution. Even though the ends that the U.S. pursued may have differed from what Chalabi had envisioned, all that mattered to him was that Saddam Hussein was removed from power and the ensuing vacancy could be filled by political operators such as himself. Once the heavy lifting, politically and militarily, had been done, Chalabi felt he could rely on his U.S. backers to ensure his place

in the post-Hussein power structure. This was Chalabi's critical miscalculation: though he had succeeded in lobbying the U.S. to overthrow Saddam Hussein, that very relationship delegitimized him as a trustworthy candidate in the eyes of the Iraqi population.

Interactions between Chalabi and Iran, and between Chalabi and the United States also demonstrated his lack of commitment to any one ideology or ally. In this case both the U.S. and Chalabi can be viewed as equally guilty of capitalizing on Chalabi's Shi'i affiliation. Chalabi represented a moderate Shi'i actor whom the U.S. thought they could rely upon to guide the Shi'i majority through what would be a tense period rife with strong emotions, as well as one who could engage with the Iranians in a way that would limit interference in the reconstruction of Iraq. For his part, Chalabi calculated that the strained relations between the U.S. and Iran would guarantee him a place in governance due to his ability to move fluidly through both camps. However, this strategy relied on the incredibly delicate act of playing each government off the other. This is the most likely explanation for Chalabi's decision to leak U.S. intelligence to the Qods Force. U.S. influence could only take Chalabi so far, and to open the coffers of unlimited Iranian support he had to demonstrate that he was an asset worth backing. The notion that this was done due to some sort of allegiance to, or identification with, Tehran should be treated with the same caution that the pages above have argued should be applied to the idea of Chalabi as a U.S. tool. There is no indication that Chalabi's priorities lie anywhere other than with his own, his family's interests, and the dreams that he had nurtured in exile for an Iraq without the Ba'ath Party.

Chalabi was an element in the neoconservative experiment that they envisioned would produce a modern, democratic, Iraq that could be a strong ally to the West and a model for the Middle East. The Neo-Cons saw in Chalabi a man who represented their interests, an intelligent, articulate man who spoke of democracy in the Middle East and freedom for an Iraqi people. In them Chalabi saw the political force and funding necessary to topple a government he could not remove on his own. Both were eager to seize upon the other in order to realize the re-forging of Iraq, whatever the costs. However, both this experiment and Chalabi himself failed to meet these expectations. Administrative failings crippled the U.S. occupation and reconstruction effort; cultural misunderstandings, poor planning, and the near impossible demands of nation building stunted the recovery of a country that had suffered under crippling sanctions and autocratic governance for decades.

Where the U.S. failed in restoring Iraq, so did Chalabi fail in restoring the gilded past he had imagined while in exile. Instead his actions and double dealings in an obsessive search for political power helped destabilize Iraq and plunge it into sectarian strife. By far the most direct and far reaching consequences arose from the excessive and blind application of the de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification process. The program served to radicalize an already frightened Sunni population that feared the Shi<sup>c</sup>i domination that Chalabi campaigned for so adamantly. Chalabi's public contempt for the idea of reconciliation did not help quell these fears as thousands of former Ba<sup>c</sup>th Party members were purged from their positions, stripping the government bureaucracy of the skilled and experienced workers needed for the state to function effectively. Nor did the tactic of using de-Ba<sup>c</sup>thification to threaten and suppress political rivals achieve anything other than uniting



large swaths of the government against him. His plan to supplement any real base of support inside Iraq by appealing to sectarian fears and employing divisive rhetoric diminished any chance for broad support from Iraqi society. The gamble on an alliance with the vociferously anti-American cleric Moqtada al-Sadr also backfired terribly as al-Sadr proved himself to consistently be a key contributor to the violence that plagued Iraq.

Clearly, Chalabi did not succeed in restoring his family's former glory in Iraq, nor regain credibility for a name that was tarnished by his Petra Bank conviction. In the end Chalabi's career foundered in a morass of political maneuvering and manipulation, as did his goal of remaking Iraqi society. Perhaps this was the inevitable result of a disjointed campaign enacted by two vastly unequal parties united in a common interest in removing a repressive regime, but without a common plan to move forward once regime change had been achieved.

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