

# WHAT AHMED CHALABI DID WHILE JUDY WAS EMBEDDED

I was all set to write the finale to my Judy Series, when I realized I was missing one important part. In the finale, I'm going to argue that Judy's embed included responsibilities to report on Chalabi as much as report on the 75th XTF. But to make that argument, I need to review what Ahmed Chalabi during the period when Judy was an embed.

The short story is that he and Judy were in Salahuddin in February, before the war. Judy appears to have flown down to Kuwait directly after that; she waited with the 75 XTF to go into Iraq. Chalabi got ferried into Nasiriyah in early April and from there got ferried to Baghdad. Both Judy and Chalabi seem to have arrived in Baghdad around the same time, mid-April. This, remember, is when Judy intervened to prevent MET Alpha from being pulled south again, out of Baghdad.

From February 11 until sometime in March, and then from mid-April until May 12, when Judy apparently left Iraq, Judy was primarily covering or getting information from Chalabi.

But it's not just Judy who was embedded with Chalabi. As we look closer at his activities at this period, some of Judy's reporting looks a lot more ominous.

## **Chalabi's Timeline**

In February, Chalabi attends an opposition meeting in Salahuddin. This is the first of several meetings that seem to reflect the jockeying for power between Defense, State, and the Iraqi opposition. Judy covers the meeting for the NYT. And we know from Arianna that Judy not only covers the meeting, but stays with Chalabi while there.

█ In Feb 2003, Judy was in Salahuddin

covering the Iraqi opposition conclave. Iraqi National Congress spokesperson Zaab Sethna told a reporter who was also there that Judy was staying with Chalabi's group in Salahuddin (the rest of the reporters had to stay 30 minutes away in crappy hotels in Irbil), and that the I.N.C. had provided her with a car and a translator (Did the *New York Times* reimburse them?). The I.N.C. offered another reporter the same, but he turned it down. Judy had just arrived in a bus convoy from Turkey, big footing C.J. Chivers, who was also there covering the story for the *Times*. While everyone else on the buses had to scramble for accommodations, she was staying in a luxurious villa loaned to the I.N.C. by the Kurdish Democratic Party.

It appears that Chalabi remains in Salahuddin for February and March—or at least he is there on April 4 when the Pentagon picks Chalabi up to fly him into Nasiriyah. Closely following Chalabi, the Pentagon flies Chalabi's militia, the Free Iraqi Forces (FIF), to Nasiriyah as well. This seems to have been a move to pre-empt the State Department-supported militia trained in Hungary, because the Hungarian militia program was suspended just before the FIF was airlifted into Nasiriyah.

Then, Defense pre-empts State again. Around April 13, just before State convenes a meeting of exiles (to which Chalabi was not invited; only an envoy of his attended), the military starts convoying Chalabi and his FIF to Baghdad, getting them there before any other exile groups.

The INC forces may begin convoying to Baghdad within the next 48 hours. That would put them in the capital before a U.S.-sponsored meeting scheduled here for Tuesday in which various opposition groups, including the INC, are to begin

charting the country's future, the sources said.

[snip]

"We expect this to be the first in a series of regional meetings that will provide a forum for Iraqis to discuss their vision of the future and their ideas regarding the Iraqi Interim Authority," Richard Boucher, a State Department spokesman, said late last week. "We hope these meetings will culminate in a nationwide conference that can be held in Baghdad in order to form the Iraqi Interim Authority."

But exactly how that process will unfold remains unclear and some of Chalabi's aides dismissed Tuesday's meeting as "not very significant," saying Chalabi would not be attending because he had not been invited. Instead, a spokesman said, the group would send another representative. Chalabi's aides said they expected him to be in Baghdad by that time anyway, "doing Iraqi politics," as one adviser put it.

On April 17, Chalabi returns to Baghdad, the first exile to return to Baghdad.

His return was not quite the triumphant arrival one would have imagined for the man who would be king, or at least president, of the new Iraq.

There was no walkabout to meet the people, not even a press conference. Instead, Ahmed Chalabi spent most his first day in Baghdad, after 44 years in exile, hidden behind the iron gates of a private club.

The FIF again comes with Chalabi. They are not welcomed any more warmly than Chalabi himself:

A Pentagon-backed Iraqi militia composed mostly of exiles rumbled into town today on the back of U.S. military trucks.

Wearing U.S.-issued uniforms, the fighters waved their weapons. They pumped their arms. They chanted joyfully of their return.

And they were greeted with a cold-eyed indifference that finally silenced them.

Chalabi becomes the top power broker in Iraq almost immediately, largely because his access to the US military makes it possible for him to get things done that others could not. From an April 27 profile:

Mindful of the task [developing support from Iraqis], Chalabi has spent almost every waking moment assiduously courting legions of Iraqis, from leaders of tribes with hundreds of thousands of members to individual torture victims. Many are invited to the club for one-on-one meetings in a small lounge. Others show up at the gates unannounced, hoping for a glimpse of the man they are certain will be Iraq's next president. Some come to take the measure of a figure they have only heard about on shortwave radio broadcasts. Some want to curry favor, subtly asking for jobs or cash handouts.

A Richard Leiby profile of Chalabi gives more details of the seemier sides of Chalabi's bid for power.

Spend a few days hanging out here and you'll witness some of the best political theater in Baghdad.

[snip]

**Secretive Americans haunt the hallways, some representing the office of Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz.**

[snip]

**The exiles have their own spy program. They gather and sift information, part of a classified Pentagon arrangement.**

[snip]

An aged open-bed truck rolls across the sun-scorched lawn about 50 feet away. It's full of documents that INC militiamen and operatives scooped up from the homes of regime big shots. **The papers are for the Defense Intelligence Agency**, Brooke reports. [emphasis mine]

Leiby's profile appears on May 10, right after Judy's second trip in search of the floating Knesset. Leiby's picture certainly seems to accord with Judy's picture. Ahmed Chalabi had cleaned the Mukhabarat (and other agencies) out of paperwork and he—and the DIA—were going through it together.

Chalabi does two more things to solidify power. About the same time Chalabi returns to Baghdad, INC associate Mohammed Mohsen al-Zubaidi declares himself Mayor of Baghdad. It doesn't take long, though, before US forces declared him illegally exercising power and took him in (note, there also seems to have been a falling-out between Chalabi and Zubaidi, just before Zubaidi was arrested by the Americans).

Also, the FIF assumes a policing role in Chalabi's neighborhood, as well as serving as interpreters for US military units.

Those fighters, known as the Free Iraqi Forces, operate checkpoints across Baghdad's Mansour neighborhood – home to the Hunting Club where Chalabi has taken up residence – a privilege not accorded to any other exile group. Some of the fighters also have been assigned to U.S. military units, where they serve as interpreters.

I explain the jockeying that takes place in early May in Part Three. To summarize, by early May, Jay Garner names Chalabi to the group of five who would form the nucleus of power in Iraq. Also, Chalabi continues to push for de-Baathification, perhaps going so far as outing a CIA asset to undermine the CIA's cause.

There's evidence to support the notion that Chalabi was so confrontational with the CIA that he would out a spy in Leiby's profile (among others).

Staffers blame the CIA for planting disinformation and allegations of Mafia-like tactics to undermine the Doctor. Some contend that delivery of aid and the restoration of essential services has been slowed because of bureaucratic infighting among Washington players.

"Nothing is working, thanks to the CIA," says Entifahd Qanbar, a nattily dressed former political prisoner who ran the INC's Washington office before he relocated here as one of Chalabi's key aides. "They want to control everything."

Granted, part of the problem is that CIA has been outspoken about Chalabi's legal troubles in Jordan. But Leiby's quotes are not unique—lots of coverage shows INC affiliates attacking the CIA. If Chalabi really did out a CIA asset to Judy for the May 1 article, it seems that Chalabi was striking back at attacks CIA had made on him which were undermining his power base in the US.

To resume the timeline, on May 12 (probably the last day Judy publishes from Iraq), Defense seems to reach a compromise with State. Bremer comes in and puts a hold on the plan to install Chalabi and the four other opposition leaders.

Things with Bremer would get worse, for Chalabi. In early June, Bremer announces the CPA would hold onto most power, the Iraqis are just too

disorganized to pick leaders, Bremer judges. Further, Bremer announces the US would name members of the council—council members wouldn't be elected. Shortly thereafter, from around June 10 to at least June 13, Chalabi comes to DC to persuade BushCo to cede more power. In addition to lobbying against Bremer's plans, Chalabi also takes the opportunity to defend the role of the INC in the lead-up to the war.

Chalabi, a former banker and Iraqi opposition leader, traveled to the United States this week to persuade Washington to quickly establish an Iraqi-led provisional government. He said that Iraqi defectors he introduced to U.S. intelligence officials helped uncover the first important arms discoveries in Iraq: mobile laboratories that the White House says were built to produce biological weapons.

"We gave very accurate information, and we produced people who we handed over to the United States who told them very significant things," Chalabi said today during a question-and-answer session with "NBC Nightly News" anchor Tom Brokaw at the New York office of the Council on Foreign Relations. "The only tangible things they have found are the mobile labs, which our defectors talked about."

[snip]

The main purpose of Chalabi's trip to the United States is to convey displeasure over the decision by L. Paul Bremer III, head of the U.S. occupation authority in Iraq, to put off plans to organize a national conference to choose an Iraqi transitional government. Instead, he plans to appoint an advisory board of 20 to 30 Iraqis.

Chalabi's defense is amusing, since Judy has

already written an article significantly questioning the mobile weapon lab claim.

Anyway, it's not clear how much success Chalabi had on his trip to the states; Bremer still retains most power in the CPA after Chalabi returns. But Chalabi is named to the Iraq Governing Council, which assumes limited power July 13.

Chalabi returns to the US again once more during the scope of our story, on July 22 and 23 to attend a UN hearing on Iraq (Chalabi was pissed that Adnan Pachachi got to formally address the UN instead of him, thereby appearing as the *de facto* leader of Iraq). As we will see, Chalabi also attends an AEI speech Dick Cheney delivered in DC on July 24.

#### **Chalabi's Other Visitors—Yankee Fan?**

As the profiles show, there were any number of hangers-on in Baghdad with Chalabi. I'm particularly interested in one of the Iraqis reported as coming into Baghdad with the Free Iraqi Fighters.

"I wept when I saw the city," said **Ahmed Ahmedizzet, a former colonel in** deposed president Saddam Hussein's feared intelligence service, **the Mukhabarat**, and now a colonel in the militia. "But we can rebuild Iraq."

[snip]

"The people don't know who we are," said **Ahmedizzet, who fled Iraq in 1998 and settled in Norway** after his opposition activities were discovered by the government. "They are afraid. . . . We are going to face many problems here. But we want the people to know we are a part of them and we want all to be part of the new family in Iraq." [emphasis mine]

You'll recall from Part Two that Judy publishes an article hailing the discovery of an Iraqi



“scientist” (I’ve called him Yankee Fan) who explained where all the WMDs were—they had been destroyed just before the invasion. MET Alpha had found Yankee Fan, Judy says, by tracking down a letter Yankee Fan had supposedly written; Judy never explains, however, how a letter written using a pseudonym also provided enough details so that Richard Gonzales could find Yankee Fan.

Judy also explains that military minders made her wait three days before she reported his discovery. Which would mean she had first met Yankee Fan on April 17. The day the FIF arrives in Baghdad.

Shortly thereafter, Judy admitted that this guy wasn’t a scientist, but rather **an officer in the Mukhabarat**. Just like Ahmedizzet. Of course, to know the WMDs were destroyed just before the war, the intelligence officer would have had to be in Iraq before the war, still a member of Saddam’s regime. He couldn’t have been in Norway and still have first-hand knowledge of what Saddam did in the lead-up to war.

So it could be that Yankee Fan is not Ahmedizzet. Or, it could be that Ahmedizzet is Yankee Fan and Chalabi and Miller are just lying about what Yankee Fan really knows.

#### **Chalabi’s Other Visitors—Harold Rhode**

Another interesting Chalabi visitor is Harold Rhode. An article published on August 9, 2003 identified Rhode as:

Harold Rhode, a specialist on Iran and Iraq who **recently served** in Baghdad as the Pentagon liaison to Iraqi National Congress leader Ahmed Chalabi

It’s not clear from this article how recently Rhode had served in Baghdad—and whether he overlapped with Judy there. This Washington Monthly profile says he is there in the spring.

Rhode got another big break when Pentagon hawks sent him to Baghdad **this**

**spring** as their thief liaison (read: handler) to Iraqi National Congress chief Ahmed Chalabi, the hawks' favorite exile. But problems cropped up then, too, when, during his stay at the occupation headquarters in Baghdad, Rhode quickly alienated most of the American military and civilian pros in the country by saying all manner of unfortunate things about Arabs, Iranians, and Muslims in general. Later he **holed himself up with Chalabi at the latter's hunt-club headquarters** and bombarded Washington with faxes about plans to install Chalabi as the George Washington of Iraq. [emphasis mine]

And this other Washington Monthly article says Rhode is in Paris in June, meeting with Manucher Ghorbanifar.

Almost a year later in June 2003, there were still further meetings in Paris involving Rhode and Ghorbanifar.

So it seems likely that Rhode is with Chalabi at roughly the same time Judy is (although presumably he is with Chalabi throughout, between February and April, too).

Regardless of timing, Rhode is clearly very closely ensconced with Chalabi in Iraq.

According to one former senior U.S. intelligence official who maintained excellent contacts with serving U.S. intelligence officials in the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad, "Rhode practically lived out of (Ahmad) Chalabi's office."

This same source quoted the intelligence official with the CPA as saying, "Rhode was observed by CIA operatives as being constantly on his cell phone to Israel," and that the information that the intelligence officials overheard him

passing to Israel was “mind-boggling,” this source said.

It dealt with U.S. plans, military deployments, political projects, discussion of Iraq assets, and a host of other sensitive topics, the former senior U.S. intelligence official said.

Rhode’s presence in Baghdad is very intriguing. Rhode is thought to be a leading candidate to be the person that leaked the Iran code data to Chalabi that would cause Defense to disown Chalabi in May 2004. He is also thought to be a leading candidate to be the “G01” listed in the most recent Larry Franklin indictment (PDF). Suffice it to say, Rhode doesn’t seem to be very good at keeping state secrets.

One more thing. Rhode’s meeting with Ghorbanifar in June 2003—and many other like that—were explained by Rummy to be attempts to get information on Iran, perhaps an attempt by Douglas Feith to sabotage any agreement with Iran. But Rhode’s visits with Ghorbanifar also coincide curiously with the development of the Niger forgery saga. And Ghorbanifar, it seems increasingly likely, may have been the guy to forward the forgeries to to SISMI.

Which is why I think it increasingly likely that the uranium document discovered (then lost) in Part Four is another forgery, planted in Iraq to close the loop on the discredited documents. One of the most likely participants in the Niger forgery caper was sitting there, in Iraq, at the time that document was discovered. And of course, all this happens at precisely the same time as Joe Wilson begins to go public with his refutation of the Niger forgeries.

#### **A Chalabi Reunion**

It kind of stinks to be Chalabi, huh? You’ve got some of America’s best and brightest, looking out for you. And it looks likely that you’ll become king or president or benevolent dictator. Then, your two good friends Rhode and Judy are

brought home to the US. And your political hopes start going south, fast.

Which is why I think it's really sweet that Chalabi got to see his buddies again, when he went to DC just after Plame gets outed.

In the audience when Dick Cheney spoke Thursday at the American Enterprise Institute was Ahmed Chalabi, head of the Iraqi National Congress and one of the 25 members of the Iraqi National Governing Council appointed earlier this month by administrator L. Paul Bremer. Chalabi did not speak to Cheney, who entered and left the stage without speaking privately to anyone, but Chalabi did exchange warm greetings with Defense Department official Harold Rhode and with Judith Miller of the *New York Times* and other reporter