

# Long-time CIA “asset” installed as interim Iraqi prime minister

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The insertion of Ayad Allawi as the new Iraqi interim prime minister makes a mockery of Washington’s claims to be bringing democracy to Iraq and preparing to hand over to a sovereign government on June 30. Moreover, the crude and hamfisted manner in which the appointment was made reveals a Bush administration that is itself torn by vicious infighting and in complete disarray.

To defuse the growing Iraqi hostility to the US-led occupation, the US had called on the services of the UN and its special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi to bring together an interim Iraqi administration. Brahimi, who has engaged in behind-the-scenes haggling in Iraq for weeks, was due to announce the new government this week for approval by the US and the UN Security Council.

The plan rapidly fell apart last week amid sharp differences over the choice of prime minister. Brahimi had made clear all along that he was seeking a technocrat, who was not aligned with any of the political factions in the Bush administration’s handpicked Iraqi Governing Council (IGC). Washington, however, was not prepared to tolerate anyone in the key executive post who was not wholly subservient to US interests.

At the bidding of the US proconsul in Baghdad Paul Bremer III, the IGC voted in favour of appointing Ayad Allawi to the position last Friday. Bremer was called into the meeting to give his formal blessing and the result was announced to the press. The move preempted any decision by Brahimi, who was left with little option but to declare that he welcomed the choice of Allawi.

UN officials endorsed the decision, but were obviously furious about being effectively sidelined. UN spokesman Fred Eckhard frostily declared last Friday that it was not what had been “expected,” but UN

Secretary General Kofi Annan “respected” the decision. “‘Respect’ is a very carefully chosen word,” Eckhard added. “I assume this choice will hold, but the process isn’t over yet. Let us wait and see what the Iraqi street has to say about this name.”

Eckhard’s reference to the “Iraqi street” reflected concerns that the decision by the IGC, widely regarded as a collection of Washington’s political stooges, would not be widely accepted. Even the IGC did little more than rubberstamp a decision made by Bremer and other US officials. Kurdish IGC member Mahmud Othman told the media over the weekend said that Allawi was a US choice: “He was an American candidate. They brought him to us. We supported him.”

As for the “Iraqi street,” Allawi is broadly despised by the Iraqi population. According to fieldwork last month by the Iraqi Centre for Research and Studies, he was the least popular of 17 prominent Iraqi political personalities. Nearly 40 percent of Iraqis polled were “strongly opposed” to Allawi—a figure that was even higher than for the reviled Ahmad Chalabi, the favourite of the Pentagon neo-conservatives.

The reasons for Allawi’s unpopularity are not difficult to find. He has a long and intimate association with Western intelligence agencies and close connections to the Baath Party and dissident elements of Saddam Hussein’s regime. His only “opposition” to Bremer has been over the issue of “de-Baathification”. Allawi has insisted on retaining officials from the key institutions of state repression—the military, police and intelligence services—in order to deal with the mounting opposition to the occupation.

Allawi presides over the IGC’s security committee and has had a hand in building an Iraqi army and police force. His deputy Nouri Badran, who is also a member of Allawi’s Iraqi National Accord (INA), runs the

interior ministry. His cousin Ali Allawi runs the defence ministry. Last December Allawi flew to CIA headquarters in the US to meet with CIA director George Tenet over the creation of a new Iraqi intelligence service to counter the armed anti-US resistance.

According to an article in the *New York Times*, Allawi received the green light to recruit ex-members of the hated Mukhabarat intelligence service, which was responsible for much of the torture and killings under the Hussein regime. Allawi's associate Ibrahim al-Janabi, another member of the IGC security committee, justified the move as essential to establishing public order. "Under the Saddam regime, the entire structure of Iraq was built around security. The mentality of the people revolved around this security," Janabi said.

Allawi has long been associated with the CIA and other intelligence agencies. Born into a wealthy Shiite merchant family, he became an enthusiastic member of the Baath Party while a student in Baghdad. He went to London in 1971 to continue his medical studies and resigned from the party in 1975. In 1978, an attempt was made on his life in London, allegedly by Iraqi agents. Allawi told the *Washington Post* recently: "At the time I was in contact with high-ranking Baath officials and military officers who shared my view that Saddam had hijacked the party."

Allawi's orientation to dissenting Baath Party members, particularly military and intelligence officers, has been the hallmark of his opposition to the Hussein regime. With the assistance first of the British MI6 then the CIA, he built a network of contacts throughout the 1980s, travelling extensively in the Middle East as a businessman. In December 1990, in the midst of the first Gulf War, Allawi established the Iraqi National Accord (INA) with the support not only of London and Washington, but of Jordan, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Allawi kept his distance from his rival Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress (INC), preferring intrigues in Baghdad to the INC's far-fetched plans for a popular uprising. As Chalabi fell out with the CIA, Allawi strengthened his ties and obtained approval for a coup against Hussein. With British, US and Saudi backing, he set up headquarters and a radio station in Jordan in 1996. The coup attempt later that year was a miserable failure and resulted in the widespread arrest of

members of his network in Baghdad.

The INA was one of six organisations to be favoured with US funding under the Iraq Liberation Act passed in the US Congress in 1998. Allawi continued to collaborate closely with the CIA and was one of the main sources of the "intelligence" that was used to justify the invasion of Iraq. In particular, he was responsible for the claim, notoriously used by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction could be operational in less than 45 minutes.

Following the fall of the Hussein regime, Allawi was one of those installed by Washington in the IGC. As well as enjoying the support of the CIA and US State Department, he has spent a small fortune on hiring professional lobbyists in the United States to promote himself in the US media and political establishment. According to papers filed with US Justice Department, wealthy Allawi supporters have paid more than \$300,000 for the services of former US diplomat Patrick Theros, law firm Preston, Gates Ellis & Rouvelas Meeds and public relations company Brown Lloyd James.

The installation of this long-time CIA "asset" as head of the interim government in Baghdad will only further alienate the Iraqi people, who have had no say whatsoever in determining the composition of the regime to take office on June 30. It confirms that the new Iraqi administration, which will be completely dependent on Washington economically, militarily and politically, will be at the beck and call of the White House.



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