

Who was Ahmed Chalabi?

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Ahmed Chalabi, the convicted embezzler who played a leading role in providing the phony “intelligence” used to justify the US invasion of Iraq, died Tuesday of a heart attack in Baghdad.

While elevated by American occupation authorities to leading positions within the US puppet regime and subsequently exploiting both US and Iranian connections to consolidate his position, Chalabi never established any serious political base among the Iraqi people.

Named in Iraqi opinion polls as the “least trustworthy” political figure in the country—and that’s saying something—his demise will be little mourned among the masses of Iraqis who have suffered unspeakable horrors thanks to the criminal neocolonial war and occupation that he promoted.

At the time of his death, Chalabi, who in Jordan in the late 1980s was convicted and sentenced to 22 years in prison for embezzlement in connection with a \$500 million banking fraud, was head of the Iraqi parliament’s finance committee.

It was after Chalabi escaped prison in Jordan in 1989 by fleeing across the border in the trunk of a car that his real political career began. From the start, it was intimately coordinated with and financially subsidized by US imperialism.

Chalabi was the scion of one of the wealthiest and best-connected families in Iraq, whose members held top political positions under Iraq’s British-installed Hashemite monarch, King Faisal II. They fled Iraq in 1958 after the monarchy was overthrown by an army officers’ coup. Chalabi himself would not return to Baghdad until 45 years later, brought back in the hold of a US military transport plane.

His rise to prominence was carried out in close collaboration with a right-wing, neoconservative wing of the Republican Party, which was determined to correct what they saw as the error of President George H.W. Bush in not prosecuting the Persian Gulf War of 1991 through to the armed overthrow of the government of Saddam Hussein. Those involved included Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith and Richard Perle.

Chalabi became the leader of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), founded in 1992 under the sponsorship of the US Central Intelligence Agency, which poured some \$100 million into the organization’s coffers in the early 1990s.

Friction would develop between Chalabi and the US spy agency over the Iraqi exile’s corruption and delusions of

grandeur. He claimed to be convinced, despite all evidence to the contrary, that the Iraqi people would rise up en masse against the regime of Saddam Hussein the moment it confronted an attack by forces loyal to the INC. The CIA believed that the government’s overthrow required a coup by the Iraqi military. In 1995, Chalabi, working with a few CIA agents in the Kurdish region of Iraq, attempted to stage a revolt, an ill-planned adventure that was quickly uncovered by the Iraqi regime, which rounded up and executed many of those involved.

While the CIA had funded the operation to the tune of tens of millions of dollars, leading agency personnel concluded that Chalabi’s revolt had been largely a sham, which he and his closest aides used to line their own pockets.

The agency also began to suspect that the Iraqi “oppositionist” was also working closely with the government of Iran, with at least one of his senior aides feeding Tehran intelligence, including the identities of CIA agents and information on US plans and operations in the region.

While the CIA apparently cut off its support for Chalabi, he only strengthened his position in Washington through his ties to the Republican Party. In 1998, his lobbying played a major role in passage of the “Iraq Liberation Act,” extraordinary legislation enshrining Washington’s commitment to the overthrow of a foreign government, signed into US law by Democratic President Bill Clinton. Congress appropriated \$97 million for the effort, much of which found its way into Chalabi’s INC.

Chalabi also sought support from the US oil conglomerates, promising that they would be the chief beneficiaries of the privatization of the Iraqi energy sector, and he curried favor with the Zionist lobby, describing the Arab-Israeli conflict as “esoteric” and proposing the revival of the Kirkuk-Haifa oil pipeline, which was shut down in 1948.

With the installation of George W. Bush in the White House and the subsequent attacks of September 11, 2001, Chalabi’s star rose. His specialty became the provision of Iraqi exiles who claimed to have first-hand evidence of the Iraqi regime’s “weapons of mass destruction” and alleged ties to al Qaeda terrorists. While the CIA concluded that virtually all of these “defectors” were impostors and charlatans, a right-wing cabal in the Pentagon, working closely with Vice President Cheney, promoted Chalabi and his “revelations” relentlessly.

In its obituary for Chalabi, the *New York Times* had “cultivated close ties with journalists in Washington.” Such modesty!

Chalabi was a key participant in the propaganda operation for the war on Iraq based on lies about “weapons of mass destruction.” His key partner in this operation was the ostensibly liberal *New York Times*, which editorialized in favor of war and, crucially, published a series of articles by its senior reporter Judith Miller supposedly confirming the WMD pretext. These “exclusives” were then picked up by the rest of the US media.

Only a year after the invasion of Iraq—and the confirmation that the WMD pretext was a lie—a 2003 email surfaced in which Miller told John Burns, then Baghdad bureau chief for the *Times*, that Chalabi “has provided most of the front page exclusives on WMD to our paper.” That is, her source for ginning up the case for invading Iraq was the head of an organization on the payroll of the Pentagon, whose civilian leadership was pushing for war.

Chalabi was unfazed by the exposure of the lies with which he was identified. In February 2004, he told the London *Daily Telegraph* that he and his cohorts were “heroes in error.”

“As far as we’re concerned, we’ve been entirely successful,” he told the newspaper. “That tyrant Saddam is gone and the Americans are in Baghdad. What was said before is not important.”

Brought back to Baghdad with US tanks, Chalabi was promoted as Iraq’s new leader. The US military armed some of his supporters, who were dubbed the “Iraqi Free Forces.” Their most famous exploit was serving as extras in the US-staged propaganda stunt of toppling Hussein’s statue in Firdos Square. Afterwards, they were implicated in looting, kidnappings, a bank robbery and other criminal activity.

Chalabi was rewarded for his services with a seat on the puppet Iraqi Governing Council, holding the rotating presidency in September 2003. He was also named head of the De-Baathification Commission, which was described as a “government within the government” that used arbitrary power to purge alleged Baathists from civil service and government posts, in the process fueling a Sunni revolt that continues to this day.

He continued to augment his personal fortune in what has been described as a system of kickbacks for the awarding of lucrative government contracts.

In May of 2004, growing tensions between Chalabi and his American sponsors erupted in raids by US and Iraqi security forces on both his home and the offices of the INC. In addition to being accused of links to kidnappings, torture, theft and murder, US sources accused him and his organization of leaking top-secret information to Iranian intelligence. The FBI launched its own investigation into who in the Pentagon was feeding Chalabi such information.

It was subsequently revealed that the raids had been preceded

by discussions at the Bush White House on a lengthy memo entitled “Marginalizing Chalabi,” drafted by Robert Blackwill, a career US diplomat brought in in an attempt to extract Washington from the deepening debacle created by popular resistance to the US occupation. He was among the advocates of currying favor with Sunni forces in order to defuse the insurgency, a policy opposed by Chalabi and his “de-Baathification” apparatus, whose actions fueled the savage sectarian war that led to the deaths and displacement of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis.

In 2005, in the first elections staged under US occupation, Chalabi’s INC garnered barely 30,000 votes, one-quarter of 1 percent of the 12 million ballots cast, failing to place a single candidate in parliament.

Nonetheless, he continued utilizing his connections, American as well as Iranian, to maintain his influence within the Iraqi regime.

In 2014, following the fall of Mosul and the routing of the Iraqi security forces at the hands of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, Washington chose Nouri al-Maliki, who the US itself had handpicked as its puppet, as the scapegoat. Casting about for someone to replace him as prime minister, US officials once again considered bringing back the convicted criminal and political scoundrel Chalabi.

Typical of the thinking within the US political establishment, the Foreign Policy web site described him as someone who had “forged strong ties with hard-line Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, as well as the major Kurdish factions and key Sunni leaders. Close to Iran and apparently now tolerated by the United States, he has emerged as perhaps the ultimate compromise candidate...”

In the end, Washington backed the current Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who has collaborated with the Obama administration in returning US troops to Iraq under the pretext of battling ISIS.

In the end Chalabi, with his loathsome history, will remain an emblematic figure of the criminal US war in Iraq. His death by natural causes and as a free man only serves to underscore the fact that those in the US government who sponsored and employed him to promote their war of aggression still remain to be punished for their crimes.



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