

Iraqis Order Chalabi Arrest in Murder Plot

by Michele Steinberg

On Aug. 8, warrants were issued by Iraq's interim government to arrest two of the top members of the hated Chalabi family in Iraq—both of them favorites of Vice President Dick Cheney and the neo-conservative cabal in the Bush government—who are leading figures in the American occupation government. The two, Judge Salem Chalabi, the chief of the War Crimes Tribunal that will try Saddam Hussein, and Ahmed Chalabi, the former member of the now-defunct Iraqi Governing Council (INC) and head of the Anglo-American-backed Iraqi National Congress, have not been apprehended, because they are out of the country. Salem Chalabi is reportedly in London, and Ahmed Chalabi, who is already a fugitive from a criminal conviction for bank embezzlement in Jordan, is reportedly in Iran. Both said that they will return to Iraq to answer the charges.

Issued by Zuhair al-Maliki, the Iraqi Interim Government's chief investigating judge, the warrant against Salem Chalabi accuses him of involvement in the murder of Haitham Fadhil, an official of the interim Iraqi Ministry of Finance. Fadhil, shot and killed on May 28, had been preparing a report on reclaiming government-owned real estate. The properties included some which had been taken over by the Chalabi family. Before he was killed, reports the *Los Angeles Times*, Fadhil had divulged to witnesses that Salem Chalabi had threatened his life.

The arrest warrant against Salem immediately cast a shadow over the U.S.-backed trial of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. "Judge" Chalabi is the head of the "war crimes tribunal" that was set up by the U.S. occupation.

For his part, Ahmed Chalabi is charged with counterfeiting old Iraqi dinars just prior to the conversion to a new Iraqi currency. Ahmed's house and so-called headquarters for the INC were raided on May 20, and computer files and records were seized by Iraqi officials. But the case of Ahmed goes much closer to the center of the Bush Administration—the axis of power linking the Pentagon's top three officials, Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, and Donald Rumsfeld, to the Office of the Vice President. In the buildup to the war, the channel between Cheney and Feith was such that raw "intelligence" reports from a network of Iraqi defectors controlled by Ahmed Chalabi, were "stovepiped" directly into speeches made by Cheney and the Administration.

Is this the end for Chalabi's scams? Despite Cheney's backing, he was unable to get the coveted appointment as Iraq head of state; in fact, after the transfer of power, he had no state

position. So, the Chalabis are screaming "foul"—from abroad! And, they claim that they are the victims of a CIA/Ba'athist plot against them, involving former American occupation viceroy Paul Bremer, and the arresting judge, al-Maliki.

Iraqis look with bitter suspicion at the Chalabis—especially Ahmed, for his silk suits, Rolex watches, and expensive homes, paid for by the U.S.A. Salem's friends include Defense Undersecretary for Policy Feith, a right-wing Zionist who oversaw the process that supplied Ahmed's INC with \$340,000 per month for "intelligence gathering." Salem is the partner in a new Iraqi law firm of Marc Zell, Feith's longtime law partner, who is also a leader of the radical Jewish settlers movement.

The Bigger Picture

The real misfortune for America is that an arrest warrant for Ahmed Chalabi hasn't been issued by the United States. What protects Ahmed is that if he goes down, so would Cheney, Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz—and possibly President Bush. But now Ahmed Chalabi is finished politically. Several major investigations of Ahmed are still under way:

- A Senate Select Committee on Intelligence probe into the role of the INC and Chalabi in providing faked intelligence that led to the Iraq War. On March 2, Knight-Ridder newspapers wrote that House Democrats had asked the Defense Intelligence Agency to provide information for a similar probe.
- A General Accounting Office investigation of the INC for misuse of government funds to lobby in the United States for a war against Iraq. *Newsweek* reported on April 5 that the probe was requested by Sens. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) and John Kerry (D-Mass.). The INC boasted that at least 108 news stories planted in major media about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction were the result of its work.
- In June, allegations surfaced that Ahmed had compromised U.S. national security by passing defense secrets to Iran's intelligence agents.

But Ahmed Chalabi (defended by attorney John Markham, a former Justice Department prosecutor who was used in the mid-1980s political frameup, trial, and imprisonment of Lyndon LaRouche) has gone on the offensive. On Aug. 11, Chalabi's daughter held a press conference in Washington, D.C., with Markham, to announce a lawsuit against the government of Jordan for seizing his Petra Bank. In 1993, the Jordanian authorities tried and convicted him in absentia (he had fled the country) for the embezzlement of depositors' money. His sentence was 22 years of hard labor.

When George W. Bush delivered his State of the Union address in January 2004, the prop used for his claim that democracy had come to Iraq was Ahmed Chalabi, seated in First Lady Laura Bush's box. Using Chalabi as a prop for freedom in Iraq will turn out to be as big a joke as Bush's "Mission Accomplished" backdrop to his infamous May 1, 2003 declaration aboard the *USS Abraham Lincoln*, that "major combat was over" in Iraq.