

Special Report: Prime Minister Allawi – a biography

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On June 28th Iyad Allawi became the interim Prime Minister of Iraq. Standing next to Tony Blair in Istanbul on that day George Bush had this to say about him.

“Allawi has, you know, fought tyranny. He's a guy that stood up to Saddam Hussein. He's a patriot. And every conversation I've had with him has been one that recognizes human liberty, human rights. He's a man who's willing to risk his life for a democratic future for Iraq.”

Bush didn't however mention that in the 1960's Allawi worked for Saddam Hussein as an assassin. Or that in the 1970's he ran Hussein's intelligence services in Europe. Or that in the 1990's, having fallen out with Hussein, Allawi headed a CIA backed organisation responsible for carrying out car bomb attacks on Iraqi civilians.

This information sheet aims to fill in the information that Bush chose not to mention.

The Baath years

Allawi first met Saddam Hussein in the early 1960's, while Saddam was still building his power base in the Baath Party. In the opinion of Vincent Cannistraro, a former CIA officer, “Allawi helped Saddam get to power. He was a very effective operator and a true believer.”

Reuel Marc Gerecht, another former C.I.A. case officer who served in the Middle East, added, “Two facts stand out about Allawi. One, he likes to think of himself as a man of ideas; and, two, his strongest virtue is that he's a thug.”

This is backed up by the memoirs of a former Iraqi ambassador, Talib Shabib, who states that Allawi was an assassin during the 1960s.

There are also doubts about his medical background. Early this year, one of Allawi's former medical-school classmates, Dr. Haifa al-Azawi, published an essay in an Arabic newspaper in London raising questions about his character and his medical bona fides. She depicted Allawi as a “big husky man . . . who carried a gun on his belt and frequently brandished it, terrorizing the medical students.” Allawi's medical degree, she wrote, “was conferred upon him by the Baath party.”

Active in London

Allawi moved to London in 1971, ostensibly to continue his medical education; there he was in charge of the European operations of Saddam's Baath Party organization and the local activities of the Mukhabarat, its intelligence agency, until 1975.

“If you're asking me if Allawi has blood on his hands from his days in London, the answer is yes, he does,” Vincent Cannistraro, the former C.I.A.

officer, said. “He was a paid Mukhabarat agent for the Iraqis, and he was involved in dirty stuff.”

A cabinet-level Middle East diplomat, who was rankled by the U.S. indifference to Allawi's personal history, told the New Yorker in June that Allawi was involved with a Mukhabarat “hit team” that sought out and killed Baath Party dissenters throughout Europe.

The Iraqi National Accord and the CIA

In 1991, Allawi was working closely with a former Iraqi official, Salih Omar Ali al-Tikriti, who was said to have supervised public hangings in Baghdad. He and Allawi founded the Iraqi National Accord in 1990. Both were former supporters of the Iraqi government.

In 1992 Allawi was recruited into the CIA. He “was highly regarded by those involved in Iraqi operations,” Samuel R. Berger, who was national security adviser in the Clinton administration, said in an interview. “Unlike Chalabi, he was someone who was trusted by the regional governments. He was less flamboyant, less promotional.”

The agency's broad goal immediately after the first Gulf war in 1991 was to recruit opposition leaders who had senior contacts inside Iraq, something Dr. Allawi claimed. The Iraqi National Accord was made up of former senior Iraqi military and political leaders who had fled the country and were said to retain connections to colleagues inside the government.

Iraqi National Accord terror campaign

The Iraqi National Accord used car bombs and other explosive devices smuggled into Baghdad from northern Iraq, the officials said. Evaluations of

the effectiveness of the bombing campaign varied, although the former officials interviewed agreed that it never threatened Saddam Hussein's rule.

One former Central Intelligence Agency officer who was based in the region, Robert Baer, recalled that a bombing during that period "blew up a school bus; schoolchildren were killed". Other former intelligence officials say Allawi's organization was the only group involved in bombings and sabotage at that time.

An American intelligence officer who worked with Dr. Allawi in the early 1990's noted that "no one had any problem with sabotage in Baghdad back then," adding, "I don't think anyone could have known how things would turn out today."

The bombing and sabotage campaign, the former senior intelligence official said, "was a test more than anything else, to demonstrate capability."

Allawi is not believed to have ever spoken in public about the bombing campaign. But one Iraqi National Accord officer did. In 1996, Amneh al-Khadami, who described himself as the chief bomb maker for the Iraqi National Accord and as being based in Sulaimaniya, in northern Iraq, recorded a videotape in which he talked of the bombing campaign and complained that he was being short-changed money and supplies. Two former intelligence officers confirmed the existence of the videotape.

Mr. Khadami said that "we blew up a car, and we were supposed to get \$2,000" but got only \$1,000, according to an account in *The Independent* in 1997.

Allawi today

Allawi has adopted an aggressive security stance since his government took over from the U.S.-led occupation on June 28.

The Interim Government has announced new emergency 'safety' laws. It has assumed powers to impose martial law, curfews, bans on demonstrations; restriction of movement, phone-tapping, opening of mail and freezing of bank accounts.

He has moved to reintegrate ousted members of Saddam Hussein's deposed regime and has also announced the formation of a new General Security Directorate, a domestic intelligence agency to infiltrate resistance forces.

Biography

1945: Born to a wealthy Shiite merchant family. His grandfather helped to negotiate Iraq's independence from Britain, and his father was a doctor and a MP.

1960s: Studies at medical school in Baghdad, where he first meets Saddam Hussein. Joins Baath party.

1971: Leaves Baghdad for London to continue his medical education. Trains to be a neurologist and obtains a master of science in medicine and a doctorate in medicine from London University. Directs European operation of Saddam's secret police. (Allawi has lived about half of his life in Britain and retains British citizenship.)

1975: Falls out of favour with the Baath party.

1978: Enters a relationship with the British security services. Word reaches Saddam's secret police. Attempt on his life. Allawi spends a year in hospital recovering from his injuries.

1980s: Travels extensively in the Middle East, holding clandestine meetings with other exiled Iraqis, and cultivating links with rebel army officers still in Iraq.

1991: Forms the exile group Iraqi National Accord with the support of the CIA and British intelligence - MI6 - and becomes its leader. INA is responsible for a number of car bombings in Iraq.

1996: An INA coup attempt ends disastrously when Saddam's intelligence services penetrate the group's dissident operations inside Iraq. In June, 30 military officers linked to the INA are executed and another 100 arrested. Saddam takes revenge by seizing land that has been owned for centuries by Allawi's rich merchant family.

2002: Allawi channels the report from an Iraqi officer claiming that Iraq could deploy weapons of mass destruction within 45 minutes to British Intelligence.

2003: After the fall of Saddam, Allawi returns to Iraq and is appointed to the Iraqi Governing Council. Holds the rotating presidency of the interim governing council during October of 2003.

May 28, 2004: Allawi is chosen by the council to become the interim prime minister of Iraq.

June 28: (Two days early) the US-led coalition hands over power to Allawi and the interim government.

Sources

For Biography see Sydney Morning Herald, 16/6/04:

<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/07/16/1089694568976.html?oneclick=true>

For the Baath years see Seymour Hersh, 'No Plan B' in the New Yorker 28/6/04:

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For the Iraqi National Accord see New York Times, 9/6/04