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Patriotism lies not in blind obedience to authority, but in the desire to search for the truth.

– Ramman Kenoun

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June 28, 2006

## The Cabal, Outed

The spies who lied us into war are at it again

The looming conflict between Iran and the United States has a nightmarish quality about it: it is like one of those dreams in which a horrific series of events is endlessly reenacted, while the dreamer is powerless to stop it. You scream and nothing comes out.

It is a rerun of the run-up to war with Iraq: the "weapons of mass destruction" that may (or, **more likely**, may not) exist, the **exile groups** proffering **dubious** "intelligence," platoons of **laptop bombardiers** urging us to strike while they sit, sipping a latté, in the **cushioned comfort** of their **well-subsidized** Washington think tanks. The **fevered editorials**, the **presidential posturing**, the **dramatic showdowns** in the UN Security Council, the tragicomic behavior of the proposed target, as its leaders **alternately** proclaim their innocence and shout their defiance, grimly preparing for **the inevitable assault**. A creepy feeling of déjà vu overcomes me as I contemplate this **familiar litany** rising from the ranks of the War Party.

How, one wonders, could we be repeating the **disastrous** series of bad decisions, grossly **self-serving projections**, and alleged intelligence "failures" that led us into the Iraqi **quagmire**? And so *soon*!

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The answer is that the foundations for this massive **propaganda blitz** and subsequent **ratcheting-up** of war hysteria were laid at about the same time as the Iraqi misadventure was conceived. The same people **who lied us into war** with Iraq have all along been deeply involved in a similar effort in regard to Iran: indeed, the two projects are intimately intertwined, as **Laura Rozen** – a senior correspondent for *The American Prospect* and one of the most **consistently interesting** reporters on the international affairs beat in Washington – reveals in her latest piece, "**Three Days in Rome?**", which appears on **the Web site** of *Mother Jones* magazine.

Both efforts came together at a **secret meeting** between intelligence operatives of at least three nations, held on Dec. 21, 2001, in Rome. Hosted by **SISMI**, the intelligence section of the Italian military, this clandestine conclave – featuring both the **storied** and the **soon-to-be-famous** – had an agenda as varied as the attendants. Over three days, American, Italian, and Iranian participants – including **Manucher Ghorbanifar**, the infamous wheeler-dealer at the **center** of the Iran-Contra scandal – discussed Middle East politics, exchanged bits of gossip, and then got down to the real business of plotting regime-change in Iran. Rozen writes:

*"Even as Chalabi and company were spinning tales in Washington about how Saddam's regime would collapse with only a minor effort from the United States, the administration's Iran hawks were eager to hear the same about Tehran – and to that end, Ghorbanifar had delivered a special guest. The guest was 'a very high-level ex-Revolutionary Guard,' Ghorbanifar later told me. 'His situation was so high that the Italian intelligence network, in order to prove he had a special mission to Italy, created a kind of fake cover itinerary to give him an excuse to the Iranian authorities.'"*

Rozen cites Tyler Drumheller, former CIA **spook-in-chief for Europe**, as remarking:

*"They drag these guys out and say they're from the Revolutionary Guard. In fact, they're actually from some rug store. In any city, it's an industry."*

Ghorbanifar's **legendary** dodginess was nearly equaled, however, by some of the other participants, particularly in the American

delegation:

- **Harold Rhode**, a specialist on Islam who speaks Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, and Farsi, and a veteran of the **Office of Special Plans** set up by DoD Undersecretary for Policy Douglas Feith, which played such a **key role** in legitimizing **Ahmed Chalabi's lies** about Iraq's **alleged WMD**.
- **Larry Franklin**, a Pentagon analyst whose specialty is Iran, a neoconservative ideologue, another OSP alumni – and a confessed spy for Israel.
- And last, but far from least, **Michael Ledeen**, another veteran of Iran-Contra – he **brokered** the connection between **Israel and the Iranians**, enabling the weapons to pass from the former to the latter – and the would-be Svengali behind an elaborate scheme to push the U.S. into a showdown with the mullahs.

The campaign to topple the regime in Tehran is utilizing the same **back-channel model** that served the neoconservatives so well before. Their method was to **stovepipe** disinformation disguised as "intelligence" directly into the White House, where all manner of fibs **found expression** in presidential proclamations of Iraq's **indubitable perfidy**. The **OSP**, or some **other** makeshift official sub-agency created especially for this purpose, would do an end run around the mainline intelligence organizations, such as the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency, **cherry-pick** bits and pieces of data that fit into a **preconceived conceptual model**, and serve up the resulting concoction of canards as **fact** or **near-certainty**. These parallel intelligence-gathering and -disseminating operations were disbanded after their goals – **misleading the Congress**, the **executive branch**, and the **American people** – were achieved, and the resident operatives quickly went on to **their next project**: bamboozling us into war with Iran.

Surely the ground has been well-prepared for such a conflict. To begin with, the invasion and occupation of Iraq could have led to **nothing else**. With Sunni-Ba'athist domination a thing of the past, the Iranians were bound to extend their influence **deep** into the "**liberated**" country. The winning coalition in the much-touted elections **owes its political existence** – and much of its funding – **to the mullahs**, who **succored them** when they were exiled during the years of Saddam's rule, training **the militias** which are now **Shi'ite death squads** and giving the future lords of Baghdad refuge on

Iranian soil. What is, in effect, a rising **Shi'ite super-state** would naturally collide with **American ambitions** in the Middle East, and the result – given the invasion of Iraq – is almost geographically fated to occur.

Secondly, however – and more importantly – a well-motivated cadre of warmongers stood ready in the wings, waiting for the right moment to begin agitating for war relentlessly. We are now living in that moment. It is fascinating to see how the roots of the present "crisis" were planted, and Rozen does an excellent job of reporting some of the little-known facts:

*"Rhode sent a classified cable from the telex room of the U.S. Embassy in Rome back to the Pentagon, reporting that the group had 'made contact with Iranian intelligence officers who anticipate possible regime change in Iran and want to establish contact with the United States government.' The cable, portions of which were obtained by Knight Ridder's Washington bureau, continued, 'A sizable financial interest is required.'"*

Isn't it always?

Just what that Rome meeting – and at least two subsequent meetings – was all about, and who authorized it, have remained rather murky and obscure subjects. The Pentagon has kept mum and **stubbornly resisted** efforts by congressional investigators to get at the truth. But Rozen is on the job:

*"The real story, as I learned in the course of a two-year investigation that took me from sterile Washington offices to smoky exile pubs in Paris, is more interesting. It's also not over. As the crisis with Iran deepens and moves to the fore, the Bush administration is putting in place key elements of the vision spun in part by the men at the Rome meeting. In a new campaign to ramp up pressure on the Iranian regime, millions of dollars are pouring into exile groups, anti-regime propaganda, pro-democracy projects, and intelligence gathering. State Department and intelligence personnel are being deployed to the region and new Iran operations offices are being 'stood up' in the State Department and Pentagon – the latter even featuring some of the names familiar from the pre-Iraq-war Office of Special Plans."*

The second phase of the War Party's **Middle East regime-change project** is now moving into high

gear. The same sort of tall tales we heard from Chalabi & Co. are now coming from Ghorbanifar, including a story about a secret store of weapons-grade uranium that somehow passed from Iraq to Iran (Aha! So *that* "explains" the curious case of the **missing** WMD! Talk about killing two birds with one stone...). What doesn't get into the White House "talking points" will **doubtless** make it into future issues of *The Weekly Standard*.

The Bush administration is currently ladling out **\$75 million** to various Iranian exile groups, and the gold rush is on: every major player and fly-by-night operator in the "democracy-promotion" racket is eager to cash in, and not just monetarily. We have to ask, aside from those who directly profit from this tremendous outpouring of taxpayer dollars, who really benefits from this effort? Who is pushing for war with Iran – and why?

The role played in these intrigues by former Pentagon analyst and **convicted** spy Larry Franklin should give us more than a hint. Franklin spent 2003 and a good part of 2004 **passing classified information** [.pdf] to two employees of AIPAC, the premier pro-Israel lobbying organization in Washington: **Steve Rosen**, the longtime sparkplug of the group's energetic lobbying efforts, and **Keith Weissman**, AIPAC's Iran specialist. A good part of this information was focused on U.S. relations with Tehran, including internal U.S. government deliberations, and especially Iran's nascent nuclear research activities. This information was given to Rosen and Weissman with the clear understanding that it would be passed on to **Israeli officials**.

Franklin, then, was acting as a conscious agent of a foreign power, even as he conspired with Ledeen and Rhode to topple the Tehran regime and **worked assiduously** to pass off Chalabi's fabrications as fact. Who else in this cabal was acting in a similar capacity? Ledeen, we know, is the **founding director** of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (**JINSA**), which has very close connections to Israeli military and intelligence circles, and Rhode is a **neoconservative ideologue** who, as Chalabi's unofficial **handler**,

*"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. Following his subsequent recall – not so voluntarily, we hear – Rhode showed up sitting next to Chalabi in the front row at Vice President Dick Cheney's rally-the-neocon-troops speech at the American Enterprise Institute in July."*

With Franklin an admitted spy for Israel, Ledeen – the Israel-Iran go-between in the arms-for-hostages deal between Reagan and the mullahs – and Rhode, the rabidly anti-Arab ideologue, we have a commonality of interests that is hard to avoid. If ever there was a living demonstration of the thesis advanced by professors **John J. Mearsheimer** and **Stephen Walt**, in their Harvard University paper "**The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy**," then this is it. As the *London Review of Books* version of their piece **averred**:

*"Pressure from Israel and the Lobby was not the only factor behind the decision to attack Iraq in March 2003, but it was critical. Some Americans believe that this was a war for oil, but there is hardly any direct evidence to support this claim. Instead, the war was motivated in good part by a desire to make Israel more secure."*

This thesis has been controversial – the Lobby has **struck back**, and brutally, by **labeling** the two brave professors bigots, and that is one of the milder accusations – but if we look at the cast of characters deeply involved in what we might call Project Regime Change (Middle East version), we can only nod in agreement. The Iraq war, and now the looming conflict with Iran, will go down in history as two of the most successful covert actions ever undertaken by a foreign government on U.S. soil. As Professor Paul W. Schroeder put it in a piece for *The American Conservative* on **the case against invading Iraq**:

*"It would represent something to my knowledge unique in history. It is common for great powers to try to fight wars by proxy, getting smaller powers to fight for their interests. This would be the first instance I know where a great power (in fact, a superpower) would do the fighting as the proxy of a small client state."*

War with Iran will be the second instance – engineered by the same cabal that cooked up the first.



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