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28 January 2003

INFORMATION PAPER

Subject: 28 Jan 03 New York Times article: "Iraqi Opponent Says He's Leaving Iran to Plan Takeover" (U)

1. ((U) Purpose. To summarize and provide background information on the subject article.
2. (U) Key Points.
  - (U) N.Y. Times reporter Elaine Sciolino wrote an article in today's New York Times that discusses Ahmed Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress (INC) and includes quoted comments from Chalabi.
    - ~~(S)~~ Chalabi, who was interviewed in Tehran (b)(1) (b)(1) discussed his plans to attend the proposed Iraqi opposition conference in northern Iraq (tentative now for 15/ 16 February).
    - ~~(S)~~ Chalabi mentions that he expects the conference to come up with "a coalition leadership council, which will be empowered to establish a provisional government at the appropriate moment so that the government will lead the process of liberation and would also assume control of the administration of Iraq." Chalabi acknowledges that the USG is not in agreement with that concept, but uses (b)(1) (b)(1) that suggests implicit USG approval.
  - ~~(S)~~ Analysis and comment: this is classic Chalabi—carefully nuanced comments designed to bring about or force decisions and actions towards his goals, often working outside established channels. Chalabi is correct when he says that there will be a conference in northern Iraq — this was a stated outcome of the previous conference held in London in mid-December. His statement, that he "expects" the conference to come up a council empowered to establish a provisional authority, is a known personal goal of Chalabi and the INC. However, he is overstepping his case by implicitly suggesting the USG will accept a conference outcome that establishes a leadership council that will be empowered to establish a provisional government. That is wishful thinking on Chalabi's part

Classified By: Maj Gen Michael Dunn, USAF  
Reason: 1.5(b)  
Declassify On: X4

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and is contrary to current USG policy of not giving expatriate Iraqi opposition groups or individuals formal authority in the transition period prior to actual regime change. Chalabi's nuanced comments (b)(1) (b)(1) are technically correct; (b)(1) about the conference, of course, and he is planning on attending, along with a few other select USG representatives. However, for Chalabi to infer that (b)(1) an official of the USG, by "favor[ing] my travel plans", was also implicitly approving Chalabi's goal of a provisional government designated as such prior to regime change, is inaccurate.

- (S) (b)(1) spoken by telephone with Chalabi to ensure that he knows the USG position has not changed. However, Chalabi and other supporters of a provisional government (most notably the Supreme Council on Islamic Resistance in Iraq—SCIRI) can be expected to continue to seek the establishment of a provisional government or the investment by the USG of some executive authority prior to the actual formation of new Iraqi political institutions in a post-Saddam Iraq.

Prepared by: (b)(6)

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