

The Finest Liars in the World

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For forty-five years, Iraqi Ahmad Chalabi ate the hard bread of exile. To ease his woes he established a bank, Petra Bank, in Jordan. When the bank went bust, Chalabi switched countries. On the way out he made \$500 million vanish into thin air, robbing thousands of shareholders.

In 1992, a Jordanian court tried him in absentia and sentenced him to twenty years of prison and hard labor. That same year the Iraqi National Congress was formed in London and Chalabi was consecrated as leader of the democratic opposition to the corrupt tyranny of Saddam Hussein.

The ubiquitous chorus of resentful foes conspired against him in the years that followed and accused him of taking a cut of contributions from the CIA. One of the absent-minded acts on the list of charges against him was pocketing \$4 million.

None of this kept Chalabi from becoming the favorite adviser for the forces that recently invaded Iraq. His collaboration enabled the invaders to lie with admirable sincerity during and after the slaughter that they carried out. And President Bush confirmed that he had been a good choice: This new ally had the same habits as his friends at Enron.

Since 1958, Chalabi had not set foot in Iraq. Finally, he made it back. He is now the favorite mascot of the occupation forces.

In Afghanistan, the favorite mascot of the occupation forces is Hamid Karzai, who is pretending to be president.

Before Iraq, Afghanistan was the chosen site for bombardment in the new millennium's geography of evil. Thanks to the thunderous victory of the invaders, there is freedom now. Freedom for drug traffickers.

According to various specialized organizations of the European Union and the United Nations, Afghanistan has become the world's principal supplier of opium, heroin, and morphine.

Estimates from these bodies show that in the first year of liberation the production of drugs increased eighteen-fold, from 185 to 3,400 tons—the equivalent of \$1.2 billion. And since then, it has continued to increase. Even Tony Blair recognized this past January that 90 percent of the heroin consumed in England came from Afghanistan.

The government of Hamid Karzai, which controls only the city of Kabul, is tight with Washington. Of its sixteen ministers, ten have U.S. passports. And Karzai himself, a former consultant for the U.S. oil company Unocal, lives surrounded by soldiers from the United States, which gives him orders and watches wherever he goes and as he sleeps.

The invaders were supposed to stay just two months, but there they remain. This is why: The incorruptible warriors of the war on drugs have set up shop in Afghanistan to guarantee the freedom to grow, the freedom to traffic, and the freedom to cross borders.

Of the reconstruction of this razed country, there is little mention any more. Ahmed Karzai, brother of the virtual president and prominent figure in the government, recently lamented: "What did they do for us? Nothing. The people are exhausted and I don't know what to tell them."

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank don't launch missiles. They have other weapons for bombarding and conquering countries and occupying the ruins.

After gutting Argentina, both organizations, early this year, sent a special team in to look over the accounts. One of the members of this finance police, Jorge Baca Campodonico, was put in charge of tax evasion.

He is an expert on the subject. In his country, Peru, a warrant for his arrest is pending for various indictments. No sooner had he landed in Buenos Aires than Interpol took him into custody. But the IMF stepped in and spent a fortune on lawyers to stop the extradition of its functionary.

FIFA, world soccer's governing body, is the game's equivalent of the IMF: It keeps vigil over the transparency of the most lucrative of all sports.

Ricardo Teixeira carries out his noble mission in Brazil. This was decided by his father-in-law, Joao Havelange, when he was the king of FIFA. Brazil, that magical country, produces extraordinary players, millionaire coaches, and ruined teams.

In late 2001, after three years and 2,400 pages of findings by two commissions, the Brazilian senate called for a trial of Teixeira and sixteen other managers. "The Brazilian Football Confederation is truly a den of crime, revealing disorganization, anarchy, incompetence, and dishonesty," declared Brazilian Senator Alvaro Dias, the chair of one of the investigating committees.

Then Joseph Blatter, who inherited the FIFA throne from Havelange, threatened to pull Brazil out of the 2002 World Cup "if they keep nosing around this matter."

The Brazilian parliamentary inquiry alleged that Teixeira had embezzled funds, diverted loans, laundered money, evaded taxes, falsified documents, and committed another twenty types of crime to make himself rich while succeeding in driving Brazilian soccer, the most successful in the world, into the red.

Teixeira remains the head of Brazilian soccer. Plus, he now has a very important position in the upper ranks of FIFA: He is responsible for justice and fair play for world soccer as a member of a FIFA's six-man audit committee.

The World Cup they vie for each year in the French town of Moncrabeau has nothing to do with soccer. It is a competition of the finest liars in the world. Contestants swear they will tell lies, only lies, and complete lies.

This article, which presents the qualifications of a few possible candidates, does not mention Silvio Berlusconi of Italy or Carlos Menem of Argentina. They are not competing, however.

They're simply unbeatable. Neither has ever risked telling the truth, the whole truth, or even the tiniest crystal of truth.

To keep from straying outside the limits of the law, a somewhat disagreeable activity, Menem simply bought it: He bought the law with money he made when he sold the country. As for Berlusconi, he passed a law just for himself: He threw out the old law and replaced it with a new one, made to order by Italian tailors.

Berlusconi is still in power. Menem, on the other hand, was left unemployed by the Argentinean people.

But sooner or later he will reappear, in the service of humanity, in command of some international organization charged with fighting corruption and arms and drug trafficking. His credentials are impeccable. What a grasp of the subject he has.