

# Shiite dissident asserts he is running Baghdad

Liz Sly

Chicago Tribune (KRT)

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Baghdad got a new leader Thursday, but no one seems to know who he is.

Stepping out of nowhere into the power vacuum left by the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, Mohammed Mohsen al-Zubaidi, 50, a Shiite dissident who has spent the past 24 years in exile, declared himself the leader of Baghdad and began setting up an administration in the corner of an unused coffee shop at the back of the Palestine Hotel.

Baghdadis said they hadn't heard of him, and American officials disclaimed any involvement in his self-styled Executive Council for the Reconstruction of Baghdad. But Zubaidi, who returned to Baghdad from London last week, is already acting as if he runs the city.

He spent the day sweeping in and out of the lobby of the hotel surrounded by a presidential-style throng of advisers, bodyguards and hangers-on. He visited a hospital where he pressed flesh with doctors and patients. He played host to a gathering of Baghdad's tribal leaders at his temporary headquarters in the coffee shop, where he pledged to work to restore electricity, water and security to Baghdad — the three biggest complaints of residents right now.

He issued a proclamation declaring himself in charge of the city and

urged all tribal leaders to disarm their followers and cooperate with U.S. forces. "The Americans have given us freedom, and anyone who shoots an American soldier must be punished," he told the gathering of tribal leaders from around Baghdad.

Such is the confusion in Baghdad right now — virtually anyone could declare himself or herself a leader and get away with it. Clerics from Shiite neighborhoods have already moved to fill the power vacuum by setting up street committees of armed young men to guard against looters. Zubaidi's claim to authority appears to have some substance, however. He has launched his own radio station, Information Radio, the first Iraqi station to go on the air since the collapse of the Hussein regime's propaganda apparatus. On Thursday it began broadcasting a mixture of Arabic music and anti-Hussein propaganda, including repeated appeals to Iraqi citizens to report any information on the whereabouts of members of the former regime to U.S. Marines.

Zubaidi is staying in a suite of rooms marked "private" at the Palestine Hotel. He said he derives his authority from elections that have taken place over the past five days among "important personalities."

"I was elected by the tribes, the religious leaders, Sunni and Shiite, the engineers, the doctors and the

military officers," he said. "All of them elected me chief of the executive council of Baghdad."

Many Baghdadis, who have broadly welcomed President Bush's promises of democracy, were skeptical.

"He had good times, happy times, outside Iraq, and now he comes back and declares himself a leader? I don't think he will be accepted," said Dr. Raed al Khazraji, a doctor at Iraq's Kindi Hospital.

U.S. military spokesmen also discounted Zubaidi's claims. "The only person that maybe could be considered the mayor of Baghdad right now is the commander general of the 3rd Infantry Division," said Marine spokesman Cpl. John Hoellwarth.

Zubaidi's announcement coincided with the arrival in Baghdad of Ahmed Chalabi, the leader of the opposition Iraqi National Congress (INC), which has close ties to the United States. He has taken up residence at the premises of the Iraq Hunting Club, a former hangout of Hussein and his relatives, which is now being closely guarded by U.S. Special Forces.

Although he is well-known in Western circles, Chalabi has no support base inside Iraq and is perhaps best known here for his indictment on corruption charges in Jordan.

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P	U	M	P	B	A	C	H	U	H	H	U	H		
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## News brief

### Chairman: PATRIOT Act won't become eternal

WASHINGTON — House Judiciary Chairman Jim Sensenbrenner said Thursday he would fight any effort now to make permanent many of the expanded police powers enacted after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks as part of the USA PATRIOT Act.

"That will be done over my dead body," said Sensenbrenner in an interview.

The Wisconsin Republican also said it was "way premature" for Congress to consider a new package of anti-terrorism proposals being drafted by the Justice Department — a so-called "Patriot Act Two."

Before that happens, he said, the "burden of proof" is on the Justice Department to prove the merits of what he called "Patriot Act One."

Sensenbrenner's comments are notable because he is a critical player in the running debate between the Bush administration and civil liberties advocates on both the right and left who see the new search and surveillance powers as a threat to privacy and individual rights.

The committee chairman has charted a middle course in that debate, supporting the 2001 PATRIOT Act despite misgivings. He fought for the sunset provision in the act, which provides that some of the government's new surveillance and investigative powers will automatically lapse at the end of 2005 unless

Congress passes and the president signs another law extending them.

The Bush administration opposed the sunset, but agreed to it as part of a legislative compromise in which it got most of the new powers it sought.

Now there is a reported push by some in Congress and the administration to undo the time limits, though it's not clear how serious and urgent the effort is.

Last week, Sensenbrenner's Senate counterpart, Republican Judiciary Chair Orrin Hatch of Utah, circulated an amendment to drop the sunset in the PATRIOT Act. Aides described it as a tactical move related to another piece of intelligence legislation.

A Hatch judiciary aide was noncommittal Thursday about whether the senator plans to aggressively pursue a repeal of the sunset anytime soon.

"I can tell you that Sen. Hatch did not support the sunset when the PATRIOT Act was passed," spokeswoman Margarita Tapia said. "He will continue to monitor the bipartisan, constitutional PATRIOT Act to ensure our intelligence and law enforcement officials have the necessary tools to prevent a terrorist act."

The Justice Department did not return a phone call seeking comment.

Sensenbrenner said repealing the sunset provision is a "non-starter" with his committee, and the "Senate better not try it." He called the sunset rule the only leverage lawmakers have in overseeing the law and getting Attorney General John Ashcroft and his department to answer questions about how they are using it.

— Craig Gilbert, Mikeauke Journal Sentinel (KRT)

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