INVESTIGATING JUAN COLE RATHER THAN AHMED CHALABI

James Risen reports that Glen Carle, a former CIA officer, says the Bush Administration was looking for dirt on Juan Cole in 2005. In one incident, Carle's supervisor asked whether the CIA had anything on Cole.

> Mr. Carle said that sometime that year, he was approached by his supervisor, David Low, about Professor Cole. Mr. Low and Mr. Carle have starkly different recollections of what happened. According to Mr. Carle, Mr. Low returned from a White House meeting one day and inquired who Juan Cole was, making clear that he wanted Mr. Carle to gather information on him. Mr. Carle recalled his boss saying, "The White House wants to get him."
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> " 'What do you think we might know about him, or could find out that could discredit him?' " Mr. Low continued, according to Mr. Carle.
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> Mr. Carle said that he warned that it would be illegal to spy on Americans and refused to get involved, but that Mr. Low seemed to ignore him.
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> "But what might we know about him?" he said Mr. Low asked. "Does he drink? What are his views? Is he married?"

Then, several months later, a CIA analyst sought information about Cole again.

> Several months after the initial incident, Mr. Carle said, a colleague on the National Intelligence Council asked him to look at an e-mail he had just received from a C.I.A. analyst. The analyst was seeking advice about an

> assignment from the executive assistant to the spy agency's deputy director for intelligence, John A. Kringen, directing the analyst to collect information on Professor Cole.

Now, Risen connects these two incidents with successful right wing attempts to persuade Yale not to offer Cole a prestigious position.

> Cole's critics – in *The New York Sun, National Review*, *The Wall Street Journal* and elsewhere, several of whom are now praising Yale for not hiring him – have maintained that they aren't using political tests, but object to Cole's career on a variety of grounds. They point to numerous quotes he has made (generally in his blog) that they say show a willingness to blame the United States and Israel inappropriately (Cole has said that some of the quotes are taken out of context and that others represent legitimate opinion). Several have also criticized his scholarship, saying that he is spending too much time on blogging and questioning his output of serious scholarship. (His supporters point to a long publication list.) Campus Watch, a pro-Israel group, maintains a long list of articles about Cole, most of which it endorses for their criticism of him.

But the timing also happens to coincide with Juan Cole's correct predictions that Ahmed Chalabi would not win the 2005 Iraqi elections. We know from AJ Rossmiller that the intelligence community made great efforts to ignore Cole's predictions.

> Chalabi won just .5% of the vote. Iyad Allawi, in whom the Administration also invested their hopes, won just 8% of the vote. And the Shiite coalition dominated by SCIRI and the Sadrists got 41% of the

votes. In his book, Still Broken, AJ describes that he saw this coming.

> After Iraq's winter elections, the results validated the predictions contained in the paper I'd written in the fall. It created something of a stir because the paper turned out to be remarkably accurate, far more so than the forecasts of other agencies and departments. Before the election occurred, a high-ranking official requested a follow-up evaluation of our assessments, and I wrote a memo that described our precision. The memo made its way up through the chain, and a few days later the office got a note from Stephen Cambone, the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, praising both the prediction and the self-evaluation.

Unfortunately, the bulk of the last half of AJ's book describes how such accurate predictions are generally weeded out by higher-ranking analysts worried that their office's work product might piss off the Administration.

[snip]

When AJ was asked how he got the 2005 election right, one of the things he pointed to, half-seriously, was the open source work of Juan Cole.

> I began to write the explanation of our methodology, and I tried to resist the temptation to criticize other agencies while explaining how and why we did things differently. State, in particular, was very sensitive

> about their screwup, and I didn’t want to piss anybody off.
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> “Sir, can’t I just say that I copied and pasted Juan Cole?”

Now, I’m not suggesting that the White House was digging dirt on Juan Cole because he correctly predicted Ahmed Chalabi would get smoked in a democratic election.

But it’s probably worth noting what opinions Cole expressed that generated this attention in the first place.