

# The Savior of Iraqi Jewish Heritage: an interview with Dr. Harold Rhode

by Jerry Gordon (December 2013)

In May 2003, [Ahmed Chalabi](#), prominent secular exile Shiite leader and the head of the opposition [Iraqi National Congress](#) (INC) received a visitor, the former Head of the Israel and Jewish Section of Saddam Hussein's [Mukhabarat](#), Intelligence Service. The visitor was seeking a safe passage document from the [Coalition Provisional Authority](#) in exchange for disclosing that there was a vast trove of ancient Jewish artifacts in what was the water-logged basement of former Intelligence headquarters in Baghdad. The Mukhabarat building had been severely damaged by a massive unexploded bomb that had pierced the water lines placing the basement under four feet of water. Chalabi reached out to former [New York Times](#) journalist [Judith Miller](#) who was embedded with the [Mobile Exploitation Team Alpha \(MET\)](#) seeking evidence of Hussein's rumored WMD – chemical and biological weapons. He also called [Dr. Harold Rhode](#), a civilian specialist and Islamic Affairs expert with the [Office of Net Assessment \(ONA\)](#), a think tank in the Office of Secretary of Defense and a friend of longstanding from their days in Washington, DC. As he was an Orthodox Jew Rhode could assess the significance of the archives. Rhode had volunteered to serve with the CPA and served as Liaison to the Iraqi Opposition for the CPA, hence the connection to Chalabi.

The MET Alpha WMD specialists, Rhode, Miller, Chalabi and workers went to the Mukhabarat in the company of the former Israel and Jewish section chief who directed them to the vast sodden array and promptly disappeared. Under the four feet of water in the basement of the Mukhabarat was a vast trove of several thousand ancient holy books, and artifacts of the legendary [Babylonian Jewish Community](#) that had been seized by Saddam Hussein in the 1970's from local synagogues and Jewish community centers.

The Iraqi Jewish community was founded 2,700 years ago when in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BCE. Israelite captives of Assyrian forces who had conquered the Northern kingdom were brought to Mesopotamia. They were joined by a second wave of Judean captives who were taken by the Babylonian forces following the siege and conquest of Jerusalem in 586 BCE under Nebuchadnezzar who destroyed the First Temple. Their plight as captives was portrayed in the lament of [Biblical Psalm 137](#) and later in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century patriotic Italian opera by Giuseppe

Verdi, [Nabucco](#). In 539 BCE Cyrus the Great [conquered Babylon](#) and in an act of humanity gave leave to Jews and other captive populations to return to their homelands. Cyrus' kindness toward captive Jews is frequently [mentioned](#) by name in the Bible. Cyrus even provided funds and aid in restoring house of worship and temples. Cyrus' edict granting human rights in the ancient world was memorialized in a cylinder contained in the archeological collection of the British Museum that is [currently on tour](#) in the US. Two Leaders of the returning Jewish Community in Babylon, [Ezra the Scribe and Nehemiah](#) the Jewish vizier to Persian King Darius led the effort to rekindle the Jewish faith and rebuild the walls. They started the construction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, capital of Judea. Ezra the Scribe is alleged to have produced the first torah scrolls, the Five Books of Moses in what ultimately became the Jewish Bible. Many Jews remained in Babylon which became the learning center of the Jewish world following the conquest of Jerusalem and the fall of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Many exiles found refuge in Babylon under the control of the [Sasanian Persian Empire](#). The [Babylonian Jewish Exilic community](#) produced the [Mishniac commentaries](#) of the Talmud.



1815 copy of mystical Zohar

Source: Drew Angere for New York Times

The [Baghdadi Jewish community](#) in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries was a significant minority with far flung commercial and Jewish Diaspora connections. When the Ottoman Empire fell at the conclusion of WWI, the British received a Mesopotamian [Mandate](#) from the League of Nations at the San Remo Conference in 1920. These former Ottoman provinces became the independent [Kingdom of Iraq](#) in 1932. Unfortunately during WWII, Baghdadi Jews suffered a pogrom, called the [Farhud](#). During the brief reign of terror in 1941 several hundred Jews were killed, women were raped, hundreds injured in the rampage and many Jewish businesses were ransacked. British forces regained control of Baghdad in May 1941. However, following WWII and the establishment of State of Israel, laws were passed by the national authorities in Iraq expropriating Jewish assets. Iraq was one of the five Arab armies that had invaded the Jewish nation in the War for Independence in 1948-1949. The vast bulk of the country's estimated 130,000 Jews were air lifted to Israel in 1950-51 in [Operation Ezra and Nehemiah](#). Many of those forced to leave Iraq were absorbed in Israel. The Kingdom of Iraq was [overthrown](#) by Iraqi military in 1958. A [Ba'athist Arab Socialist Republic](#) replaced it in 1968 which was overthrown by [Saddam Hussein](#) only to be defeated in 2003 in the [Iraq war](#). Despite this turmoil and public executions of several Jews, several thousand remained in Iraq. Today there are virtually only a handful of aged Jews in Baghdad. They contributed to the sodden archives of the vanished ancient Jewish community that confronted Rhode, Miller and Chalabi in May 2003 in the flooded basement of

Hussein's Mukhabarat. It was a veritable [Genizah](#) – a depository of Jewish documents and community archives. It was not unlike the fabled one discovered in the 1890's in Cairo by Cambridge University Jewish Scholar, [Solomon Schechter](#).

By default Rhode, an Ashkenazi Jew, became the savior of the Babylonian or Iraqi Jewish heritage. See his [PJ media article](#) about saving the archives. Working with Chalabi, Rhode and a team of workers they dewatered the Mukhabarat basement, endeavoring to salvage the documents. Rhode learned from contacts in Israel that they needed to cool or freeze the artifacts for restoration. The US government obtained a refrigerated semi-trailer. Chalabi procured metal containers to store the Iraqi Jewish archives for ultimate shipment to the US for restoration. Rhode working through his Pentagon mentor, [Richard Perle](#), former Chairman of the Defense Policy Advisory Committee, ultimately obtained the backing of Bush Vice President Cheney. He facilitated the professional support of the US [National Archives and Records Agency](#) (NARA). NARA sent archival restoration specialists to Baghdad to evaluate and supervise the shipment of the Iraqi Jewish archives to their laboratories for restoration and digitization. Initial funding for the restoration project came from a \$15,000 grant from [Harvey Krueger](#), a New York investment banker then with Lehman Brothers. In July 2003, the CPA reached an agreement under international law with the Iraq interim government for return of the restored Jewish archives. An agreement that is [controversial](#) as Rhode and others contend that the Hussein's Mukhabarat stole the property from the Jewish community and that it rightfully should be returned to the Babylonian Jewish Heritage Center in Israel. The Iraqi government [contends](#) that the archives may contain important historical information of the origins of the country. The saga of Rhode's role in salvaging these archives is embodied in an [exhibit](#) of more than two dozen restored items from the [16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century](#) mounted by NARA in Washington, DC. The exhibit opened on October 11, 2013 at the Lawrence F. O'Brien Gallery and will close January 5, 2014. Rhode volunteers as a docent each Sunday to lead visitors through the NARA exhibit. A [petition campaign](#) has been created to return the restored and digitized Iraqi Jewish archives to the [Babylonian Jewish Heritage Centre](#) in Israel.

You may view the artifacts at the NARA exhibit's website, [here](#). [Watch](#) this NARA You Tube video about the restoration of the Iraqi Jewish archives.

Rhode is a native of Philadelphia who in his youth followed a professional interest in Turkish and Islamic Affairs becoming an accomplished linguist in Arabic, Turkish and Persian. In the summer of 1978 he studied at Ferdosi University, Mashad, Iran, witnessing the early stages of the Iranian Revolution led by exiled Ayatollah Khomeini. He received a PhD in Islamic History, specializing in Turkish, Arabic and Iranian affairs, from Columbia University in 1979. In 1982

he went to work for Richard Perle in the Office of the Secretary of Defense as an Islamic Affairs expert. In 1994 he starting working for Andrew Marshall the director of ONA, where he remained until he retired in January 2010. Rhode's experience while serving 28 years at the Pentagon in Islamic Affairs, Net Assessment and Policy Development have given him a unique perspective about national security issues regarding the Middle East region.

Against this background we interviewed Dr. Harold Rhode.



**Jerry Gordon:** Dr. Rhode thank you for consenting to this interview.

**Harold Rhode:** Thank you for inviting me.

**Jerry Gordon:** You spent three decades as an expert on Turkey and Islamic Affairs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and at a Pentagon think tank, The Office of Net Assessment. What were some of the assignments that you were engaged in?


**Dr. Harold Rhode:** My knowledge of the Islamic World extends over 50 years starting when I was 14. Turkey is one of my primary areas of expertise. My Columbia University dissertation concerned what is Northern Israel or Southern Lebanon under Ottoman Rule. Richard Perle brought me into the Pentagon to cover Turkey and the Islamic world from 1982 to 1994.

I worked on Iraq for twelve years from the Kuwait/ Gulf War through its liberation and thereafter, also working on Iran the entire time while serving as the Turkish Desk Officer. This was for about nineteen months around the time of the Kuwait War.

**Gordon:** Why were you deployed to Iraq in Operation Enduring Freedom in 2003?

**Rhode:** They were looking for people to go. I had spent twelve years working on these issues. So I volunteered me and my wife agreed.

**Gordon:** What was the background for the discovery of the Iraqi Jewish Archives in Baghdad in April 2003?

 **Rhode:** When a tyrant is defeated all those who worked for him come to the new people and say I'm cooperating, in other words, please don't kill me and give me a pass. One of the persons we encountered was the head of the Jewish and the Israel sections. We didn't know there was a Jewish section. Logic told us there had to be an Israel section but not a Jewish section of the Mukhabarat. Mukhabarat is the best way to describe it. In English it's the combination of the FBI and the CIA. It was the Iraqi intelligence service. The person in charge of this Intelligence section went to Ahmed Chalabi. In my opinion Chalabi was a great

man and the American government when it's upset with somebody will call l call them an Iranian spy. Shiite leaders in Iraq have some relationship with Iran irrespective of who rules Iran, because Iran is the largest Shiite power in the world.

Anyway, the man in charge of this section in the Mukhabarat indicated that there was an ancient Hebrew scroll from the seventh century written on parchment. He apparently was talking about a Torah or copy of the Talmud, but he didn't know what it was and he figured that since it was written on parchment, it must be very old. He clearly did not realize that all Torahs, no matter when they were written, must be written on parchment.

Chalabi called me and Judith Miller, former *New York Times* journalist who was embedded in the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) group. The former head of the Jewish and Israel section of Saddam's Iraqi Intelligence Organization, then took Judy Miller's WMD team, a lot of members of Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress and me, to the Mukhabarat, and showed us basement which was flooded.

The reason it was flooded is that the Americans had dropped a bomb on the intelligence headquarters. The bomb did not explode but instead, cut through the building destroying the water system. This explains why the water dripped down into the basement where the Jewish and the Israeli sections were.

The American government and the WMD team were also interested in the building to look for information on WMD. The WMD team waded into the water and first came upon the Israel section. They then proceeded down the hall and came to the Jewish section, pulling out material from both sections. From the Israel section, they pulled out a huge picture of the Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock, a map of Israel's Dimona nuclear reactor, and a sign in Arabic – "Whom will send off the 40<sup>th</sup> missile towards Israel. (NOTE: IN the Kuwait war, Iraq fired 39 missiles at Israel.) They also pulled out some Jewish religious material from the Jewish section. Judy and her WMD team went on to do their assignments.

Perhaps because I am an Orthodox Jew. I knew what this material was. By default I was left in charge or else nothing would've happened. Chalabi paid for Shiite workers and also for two small pumps which would suck out the water during the night the level of water would go down, we would go in and try to get the stuff out. We took this material out and put it in this courtyard, a picture of which is on the National Archives website. Chalabi then provided me and the workers with about 30 aluminum trunks into which we put what we found, after drying out the material. I knew nothing, about document preservation. A friend in Israel connected me with the restoration section of the Hebrew University by phone and they were giving me

instructions about how to save this material. They told me to put all the materials into a dry cool room. When I told them we that didn't have much electricity, let alone air conditioners' to dry the material, they ended up saying "Well do the best you can."



**Gordon:** Who did you reach out to provide initial and continuing support of the Jewish Archives project?

**Rhode:** Well I tried to solicit the American Authorities in Iraq and they couldn't have cared less. Through a mutual friend, I procured a grant from a wonderful philanthropist in New York – Harvey Kruger then of Lehman Brothers – to pay for the workers. As this was happening, Natan Sharansky called me from time to time when I was in Iraq, basically as a friend to see that was alive and so did Richard Perle. Richard is like an older brother to me. Sharansky asked if he could help. I suggested that he call Vice President Cheney, with whom he was friendly. I also asked Richard Perle to call Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. Cheney and Rumsfeld then expressed interest in this and all of the sudden the American government took over the project.

Once it involved the National Archives I was out of it. The National Archives has done a marvelous job with the restoration of the Iraqi Jewish archives.

**Gordon:** When was the agreement reached with the Iraqi government for return of the restored Iraqi Jewish archives?


**Rhode:** I think that occurred when the American government concluded the agreement with the Iraqi authorities. The American government considered the archives as property which belonged to Iraq and therefore the International law it has to be returned. However, this was really property stolen by the previous Iraqi governments from the Jews who fled the country, mostly in 1950-51.

The problem is most of this is private property. These were holy books that belonged to individuals. They never belonged to the Iraqi government. When, for example, Iraqi Jews had a Torah made, if you moved to another synagogue, the Torah moved with you. In 1950/51 when most of the Jews left they were not allowed to take this material with them. They were only allowed to take basically a suitcase of clothes, if that, and so the Jews were forced against their wishes to leave the material behind.

**Gordon:** It has been suggested that the Iraqi Jewish Archives should be deposited with the

Iraqi Jewish Museum in Israel. Is that feasible given the current agreement with the Iraqi government?

**Rhode:** If this is private property it belongs to the Jews. If it can't be identified then it becomes the property of the exiled Iraqi Jewish community. 85% of the exiled Iraqi Jews and their descendents live in Israel. As exiled Jews from the Muslim world their property was expropriated. They have no access to their material.

**Gordon:** What are the highlights of the current Iraqi Jewish Archives exhibit in  Washington?

**Rhode:** I've only seen it about six times and I led groups at the Exhibit every Sunday. First of all it's a tiny fraction. I think there are only 27 pieces. The Archives have beautifully restored and digitizing this material. Several of the important pieces tell the story of the Jewish world connections of Baghdadi community to the World Jewry. Up until World War I, for example, almost all of the books were printed in Livorno, Italy. These books give us an appreciation of the mindset and connections of the Baghdadi Jews.

**Gordon:** How ancient and significant was the Iraqi Jewish community?

**Rhode:** It goes back 2700 years since the beginning of Jews living in that part of the world. It goes back to the first Israelite exile. It's ancient. Most of the communities to the East Bombay, Calcutta, Rangoon, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, all come from there. The Babylonian Talmud was developed in what is present-day southern Iraq.

Before World War II Jews was a quarter of the population in Baghdad, over 80,000. They were the largest group there.

**Gordon:** There was a pogrom, The Farhud, in Baghdad in 1941 during a pro-Nazi putsch. What were the consequences for the Iraqi Jewish Community?

**Rhode:** There was pro-Nazi premier, Rashid Ali, who in 1941 seized power with Nazi backing. Several hundred Jews were killed and many businesses destroyed. The British were about six miles outside the city and knew exactly what was going on. They did nothing for a few days; Baghdadi Jewry thereby understood that its days were numbered.

**Gordon:** When the State of Israel declared Independence in 1948, what actions did the Iraqi government impose on the Jewish community?

**Rhode:** There was a whole network trying to bring Iraqi Jews out. The Iraqi government made

life absolutely unbearable and even people who were not particularly Zionists really had no choice but to leave. Their lives in Iraq were basically over because of the restrictions placed on them by the Iraqi government were very strong. Harold Luks wrote about the end of the Iraqi Jewish community drawing upon State department documents prepared by staff who weren't particularly pro-Jewish. He prepared this for Clark Clifford many years ago. The article describes the horrors of what the Iraqi government was doing to the Jews.

**Gordon:** The State of Israel undertook Operation Nehemiah and Ezra to repatriate the Iraqi Jewish Community. What was the scope of operations and who absorbed the cost of their resettlement in Israel and the community's Diaspora?

**Rhode:** I don't know the details of the Operation to repatriate Iraqi Jews to Israel, but what I do know is that it was Jews that did it. It was fellow Jews, it was Israel. It was not from the international community.

**Gordon:** How well has the Iraqi Jewish community been absorbed in Israel and its Diaspora?

**Rhode:** I would say easily close to 100% easily. The Baghdadi Jews are smart and entrepreneurial. Within five years many who came with nothing had surpassed their Ashkenazi fellow Jews. They were doing better financially. They are integrated extremely well. Did they have complaints culturally? Everybody had complaints culturally.

**Gordon:** Since your retirement from the Pentagon you have been active in opining on Middle East issues including resolution of the Israel Palestinian conflict. Why in your opinion is a final status agreement not achievable?

**Rhode:** The underlying problem of the Arab-Israeli conflict is how Islam understands territory. From a Muslim point of view, any territory conquered by Muslim is Muslim forever. For example there is a very active discussion about al-Andalus – southern Spain – in Arabic on the internet and how the Muslims are going to reconquer it. They lost this territory 521 years ago and they are still talking about getting it back. There is organization in Cordoba which is preparing for the reconquest of Spain for Islam.

Israel – whatever its present border, is, from an Islamic point of view, Islamic territory. Israel which is only sixty-five years old, was conquered in 637-38 C.E. and since then it is must remain Muslim territory. Many people with the best of intentions, including the American Government, who think that they can come to some compromise. The problem with this that compromise in the Middle East is understood in terms of personal honor. As Clinton wrote in his book about Arafat, when Ehud Barak offered Arafat everything including the Temple



Mount, but excluding what is below it, Arafat jumped up and said I will not have coffee with Sadat who was by then dead. Arafat then blurted out that there had never been a Jewish Temple. No Muslim leader can sign any agreement with Israel, in which Muslims acknowledge that Israel has any right to this Muslim land, irrespective of Israel's size and borders. Moreover, without a "Thought Revolution" in Islam, no Muslim could sign any agreement in which Muslims accede to "that agreement being the end of the conflict." Any leader who did so would suffer personal humiliation from an Islamic point of view. This is unbelievably sad. I wish what I was saying weren't true but I've spent so many years even before I worked at the Pentagon travelling throughout the Middle East. I know the languages and the cultures and was able to talk with people and realize as much as I'd love to come to a Western-oriented compromise, it is impossible in the Middle East.

**Gordon:** What is your opinion about the current US Administration's capabilities to provide a realistic assessment of the Islamic Middle East?

**Rhode:** I think that America has the best of intentions and is trying to make the world safe for the American view that we all need to sing Kumbaya and all get along. The rest of the world doesn't understand that. At the moment Middle Easterners detect weakness, they pounce. American Mideast policy, if in fact there is one, is demonstrating weakness over and over again in the last few years.

We vacillate; we constantly change our minds. We are going to bomb Syria and then, oh, never mind. Iran will not have nuclear weapons yet everybody now knows that the agreement that the Americans were prepared to sign is not true because a lot of people have their own agendas. This is a very dangerous area and to see the Saudis and Israelis on the same page is mind-boggling. The American government has demonstrated that it is an unreliable ally and a harmless enemy. Regarding Iran, Iran is not the problem; it is this particular terrorist government of Iran that is the problem. Do we, or our Israeli and Saudi allies really want to let these terrorists have nuclear weapons?

**Gordon:** What is your outlook on what may happen with the P5+1 negotiations over a Nuclear Iran?

**Rhode:** I am a Historian. I have difficulty enough predicting the past. I am not a prophet. The age of prophecy is over and so I can't tell you what they will do. I think the West—particularly the US—has lost its way. We wish to avoid war at all cost. That is what is called appeasement. That is what happened at Munich in 1938. All of this could have been in the bud in the beginning when you could have taken care of problems like these. Iran's tyrants

tell us exactly what they are going to do; just listen to its supreme leader Khamenei. Interestingly, the term "Supreme Leader" best translates into Western languages as "Führer – the title used by Adolph Hitler. Moreover, the savvy Iranian President Rouhani was the negotiator for nuclear issues for Iran in the period 2003 to 2005. He really took us for a song and we chose to be taken. Americans believe that if you look at somebody in the face, you shake their hand and you speak the holy language – meaning English – that you're of course telling the truth. But in the Middle East they don't have anything of the sort. English doesn't matter and to look someone in the face and lie absolutely normal. What Reagan said, trust but verify is what I say.

I'm concerned about our ability to dispassionately look at that part of the world and for that matter other parts of the world where I'm not an expert and draw honest and appropriate conclusions.

**Gordon:** What is your evaluation of the Islamist agenda of the Turkish regime of Premier Erdogan?

**Rhode:** Erdogan is a fundamentalist. He is basically an ally of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, Egypt, and elsewhere. He supported Morsi in Egypt; he supports the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. It is not surprising to me. It just fits in to hand in glove. He loathes Atatürkism which was the idea of separating religion from state. There are YouTube videos of his last victory speech about two and a half years ago in Turkish. One of them has an excellent English translation of the same speech in which when he said "this victory is as important here in Ankara as it is in Sarajevo." Sarajevo to the best of my knowledge is the capitol of a foreign country called Bosnia-Herzegovina. Erdogan went on: "This victory is as important in Izmir he said as it is in Damascus." Again a capitol of a foreign country. Finally, Erdogan says his victory is as important in Istanbul as it is in Jerusalem. These are old Ottoman territories. He is in essence saying his electoral victory is as important in any previously occupied Muslim territories. You know, we call that imperialism. Oh, but he can get away with it. Remember he is a fundamentalist and as a fundamentalist, he has natural allies with the Muslim Brotherhood, with Hamas and Morsi. Therefore the idea of reconciling with Israel is an existential problem. It can't be done.

**Gordon:** The Kurds in the Middle East have been denied a promised state of their own since the end of WWI. Why has this occurred and are they natural allies of Israel?

**Rhode:** The overwhelming majority of the Kurds are Sunni. The Kurds have a history of the Arabs, Persians and the Turks trying to destroy their national ethnic identity. Very senior

American officials have only a year ago told senior Kurdish leaders in Iraq, "Stop thinking of yourselves as Kurds. Think of yourselves as Iraqis." That shows how much we really understand about the world. The Kurds definitely fear they face an existential threat is trying to destroy their Kurdishness. History has shown that they are right and you can understand that they don't like that very much.

There is a very positive feeling towards Israel in Iraqi Kurdistan. It's pretty widespread. It isn't an independent country so they can't necessarily have what they want. There are surveys where Kurdish young people make it very clear that they want relations with Israel and in the future we'll see what happens. Will Iraq remain a united country? I don't know. Will Turkey remain a united country? Erdogan has publicly said that if things continue as they are now that by 2038 there will be a 50/50 Kurdish population within Turkey. The truth is then the Turkish government knows that that day of reckoning is very close at hand. In fact, it may already be here. The Kurds define themselves who they are. It boils down to: if your father is a Kurd, you are a Kurd whether you know Kurdish or not and that's how Kurds all throughout Turkey answer that question. I've met all sorts of people who are completely unable to speak any Kurdish but the father and their fathers' father were Kurds and so they're Kurds. Not my definition. Their definition. We'll see where this takes us.

**Gordon:** How does Hezbollah threaten Lebanon and Israel?

**Rhode:** Hezbollah is an extension of the Iranian government. It isn't necessarily the view of how many Shiites in Southern Lebanon look at Israel. The fact is that in the late 1970's when Israel marched into Southern Lebanon to stop the PLO's terrorist actions vis-a-vis Israel, the Shiites welcomed the Israelis as liberators with open arms with rice, with flowers and hugging them. But things went wrong.

Like it or not, the Iranian government is destroying Shiism. Shiites have tremendous fear of the Sunnis. They are a minority. They are like twelve to fifteen percent of 1.4 billion people if there are that many Muslims in the world. They have been under constant attack by the Sunnis. Their historical narrative is filled with incidents where Sunni murder, maims, or at best discriminates against the Shiites. The Shiites, along with other non-Sunni and non-Muslim groups share a commonality with the other groups who swim in the Sunni sea in the Middle East. These include the Christians, the Alawites, the Druze and the Jews. Now in the past, the Shah of Iran recognized this. Iran was Shiite under the Shah but wasn't ruled by the Mullahs. There are very few Iranian Mullahs who like the Islamic regime. Most of them hate it, because they realize their dictators are destroying their beloved Shiism. If the Ayatollahs were overthrow in Iran the Shia would be natural allies that Israel – as would be all of these

other groups that swim in this huge Sunni sea which extends from Morocco to Indonesia.

**Gordon:** There is talk of an alliance of convenience against a Nuclear Iran in the Middle East composed of Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates. How realistic is that?

**Rhode:** It hasn't worked that way unfortunately. We have at the moment a tactical problem that is Iran with nuclear capability posing a threat to Sunni Wahhabi-ruled Saudi Arabia more so than it would ever be to Israel. Israel can defend itself. Israel is probably more powerful than Israelis realize. Israel suffers from this Jewish mentality of what are they – i.e., the non-Jews – going to do to us next because that's our history from Europe. We couldn't defend ourselves. Israel is pretty good at doing that right now.

Now Saudi Arabia cannot defend itself and it knows for sure that it cannot rely on the United States to do that either. This is why I believe that Israel and Saudi Arabia are very close, but this is a tactical problem. When and if Iran is liberated from this regime, it would not surprise me whatever relationship Israel and Saudi Arabia have simply dissipates. Why do I think this? When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, a lot of the Jews in Washington, suddenly had the Saudis and the Kuwaitis reaching out to them. However, the moment that Kuwait was liberated, by the Americans, those phone calls to the Saudis weren't returned, the connection was cut off entirely and that was that. And all of these nice Jews who thought that they were making peace were disappointed. That is, I believe, what will happen once Iran is no longer ruled by the anti-Western and anti-Sunni clique which rules that country today. After regime change, Iran will no longer be a potential nuclear threat to its Sunni neighbors, because it will almost assuredly be pre-occupied with internal Iranian matters – not trying to destroy Israel or its Sunni neighbors. For the moment – and God knows how long that moment will be – the interest of Saudi Arabia, Gulf Emirates and Israel are in alignment.

**Gordon:** Why in your opinion did the Saudis reject a UN Security Council Seat after lobbying hard for it?

**Rhode:** I don't know first of all and I am speculating. The real reason is that it's a joke. The Security Council has proven over and over again that when serious problems occur, for example they have murdered so many people in Syria today, the Security Council is silent. But it sure has been a great whipping board to get back at Israel. Saudis couldn't care about that. What they could care about is that the Security Council votes on something and Russia, China, France, America, Britain, whatever, vetoes it. The Saudis are going to be lumped in with that group and they don't need this for their own political situation at home.

**Gordon:** The Saudis have backed Blasphemy Codes through the work of the Organization of

Islamic Cooperation at both the UN and even conferences in Washington. Do you view that as problematic?

**Rhode:** You mean where we can criticize and make fun of Christianity and Judaism but we can't do that about Islam? Yes. The West does not believe in itself anymore and historically when civilizations don't believe in themselves they are not long for this world. However, I think the Saudis will fail at that. As they say whoever funds something in the Middle East, owns it. This organization is Saudi funded. It's based in Jeddah. Yes, they have a Turk who heads it. The same executive has been heading it for many years. They constantly say awful things about us. I remember a famous statement which was, "he spits in my eye and I say it's raining." Why are we ignoring the truth?

**Gordon:** How important given your national security experience is the US relationship with Israel?

**Rhode:** Most countries derive enormous benefits from this. The Israelis have been able to test American weapons against the weapons of adversaries of the United States. The Israelis have also developed their own military technology. I can tell you in the years that I was at the Pentagon, Israeli technology know how and experience has been integrated into the American military. When American aid was first given to Israel, in '69, '70, '71, Israel received three billion dollars a year and it's GNP was about 17 billion dollars a year. Today that same amount of money is being given, but Israel's GDP is now about \$350-\$400 billion dollars a year. Back then US defense aid was a significant proportion of Israel's GDP, now it's insignificant. The importance of what Israel and America have in common is the values as James Woolsey, the former head of the CIA said. The values of Mt. Sinai meaning that we're all equal, every human being is equal. No more, no less and that we are a people, either American or in this case Israelis who are answerable to the law. We must live within a legal framework. What we have in common is enormous. Besides the technological help on both sides, I will tell that you when American and Israeli military people get together, they understand each other. They are on the same intellectual and technological levels. We can't say that about other places right now because Europe is technologically behind the United States. Israel is really up there with the United States. There are marvelous connections between our two countries and I would hope that the strong friendship which exists and between the American people and the Israeli people will continue. I cannot see how it won't. Irrespective of how the American government is trying to retreat from the world telling everybody what is best for them, and abandoning its friends. America, especially under this current Administration, has proven itself to be an unreliable friend and a harmless enemy. God willing that will change. America is the greatest social experiment in the history of the

world. Anybody with half a brain comes to this country can make something of themselves, wherever they come from. I believe that we are in danger of losing that.

**Gordon:** Dr. Rhode thank you for this authoritative interview and championing the cause of retuning the Iraqi Jewish Archives to the community in Israel.

**Rhode:** Your most welcome.

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Also see Jerry Gordon's collection of interviews,