



U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell holds up a model vial of anthrax during his historic presentation before the United Nations Security Council, February 5, 2003. (Image extracted from a video [available from the White House Web site.](#))

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THE RECORD ON CURVEBALL

Declassified Documents and Key Participants Show the Importance of Phony Intelligence in the Origins of the Iraq War

**National Security Archive Electronic
Briefing Book No. 234
Edited by John Prados**

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Washington, DC, November 5, 2007 - CBS News' *60 Minutes* exposure last night of the Iraqi agent known as CURVEBALL has put a major aspect of the Bush administration's case for war against Iraq back under the spotlight.

Rafid Ahmed Alwan's charges that Iraq possessed stockpiles of biological weapons and the mobile plants to produce them formed a critical part of the U.S. justification for the invasion in Spring 2003. Secretary of State Colin L. Powell's celebrated and globally televised briefing to the United Nations Security Council on February 5, 2003, relied on CURVEBALL as the main source of intelligence on the biological issue.

Today the National Security Archive posts the available public record on CURVEBALL's information derived from declassified sources and former officials' accounts.

While most of the documentary record on the issue remains classified, the materials published here today underscore the precarious nature of the intelligence gathering and analytical process, and point to the existence of doubts about CURVEBALL's authenticity *before* his charges were featured in the Bush administration's public claims about Iraq.

Electronic Briefing Book The CURVEBALL Affair by John Prados

On February 5, 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell made a dramatic presentation before the United Nations Security Council, detailing a U.S. bill of particulars alleging that Iraq possessed

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Iraq and Weapons of Mass Destruction

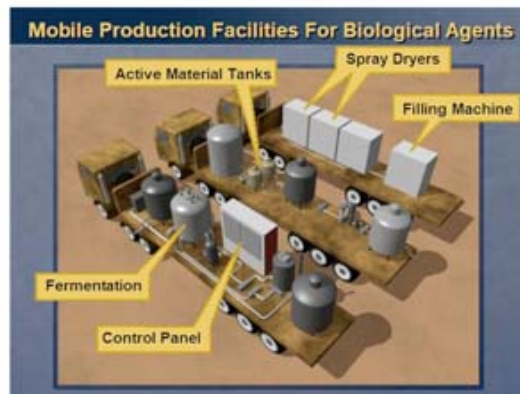
weapons of mass destruction that threatened not only the Middle East, but the rest of the world. Unbeknownst to the public at the time, a key part of the U.S. case—relating to biological weapons—was based on the direct knowledge of a single agent known as CURVEBALL, whose credibility had previously been cast in serious doubt.

CBS News' *60 Minutes* is now reporting the identity of the agent as one Rafid Ahmed Alwan, ([Note 1](#)) who appeared in a German refugee center in 1999 and brought himself to the attention of German intelligence. CBS News describes Alwan as "a liar ... a thief and a poor student instead of the chemical engineering whiz he claimed to be." ([Note 2](#)) If accurate, the CBS report raises even more troubling questions about the basis for the Bush administration's decision to go to war in Iraq, as well as more general considerations about the relationship between intelligence and the policy process.

By way of background to this latest revelation, the National Security Archive is reproducing the existing public record on CURVEBALL as derived from declassified records, official inquiries and former officials' accounts. The documents below are a small fraction of the full record, which remains almost entirely classified. The National Security Archive has filed Freedom of Information Act requests for these still-secret materials and will post them as they become available.

The public record as of this posting, while miniscule, nevertheless has an important story to tell, the centerpoint of which is Powell's speech, which represented the Bush administration's most powerful public argument leading to the decision to invade Iraq.

Powell's address, modeled after Adlai Stevenson's vivid appearance before the same body in 1962 during the Cuban missile crisis, was punctuated by a glossy slide presentation and show-and-tell devices including a vial of powder which he held up before his audience, declaring that if it were a biological weapon it would be enough to kill thousands of people. Saddam Hussein, Powell forcefully asserted, possessed stockpiles of such weapons and the infrastructure to produce them. ([Note 3](#))



Graphic from Powell's February 5, 2003, presentation before the UN

According to both of the major official U.S. investigations into Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs—by the so-called Silberman-Robb Commission and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence ([Note 4](#))—Powell based this particular claim on data gathered by the CIA, which in turn relied principally on information it had obtained indirectly from CURVEBALL. (See excerpts from both reports below.)

Secretary Powell was concerned that in his Security Council briefing he use only completely authentic data. To ensure this, he conducted an extensive — and unprecedented—review of each data element that might be included in the U.N. speech. This process took days and was

performed on a continuous basis in a conference room at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Powell relied upon his chief of staff, Lawrence Wilkerson, and a team from the State Department during this process. Participating CIA officers were provided by agency Director George J. Tenet or his deputy, John E. McLaughlin, with substantive specialists presenting relevant items in their fields of expertise. These meetings have usually been presented from the perspective of White House officials, especially vice-presidential aide I. Lewis (“Scooter”) Libby and Deputy National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley, who were reported as being intent on inserting a particular menu of charges into the Powell speech. But the decision to include the CURVEBALL information was also made here. ([Note 5](#))

This process began on January 29, the day after President George W. Bush’s State of the Union address, which had also included the claim that Iraq possessed mobile biological weapons plants. Unknown to the State Department reviewers, CIA officers elsewhere were simultaneously in an uproar over the CURVEBALL material. ([Note 6](#)) In answer to queries from CIA manager Margaret Henoch, the German intelligence service, which had Alwan in their charge, refused to certify the CURVEBALL data and denied CIA access to the original transcripts recording the conversations. Thus, the agency never had direct contact with CURVEBALL, who in fact had only been seen once by an American, an official of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), who had harbored doubts about the man. The CIA was working strictly from DIA translations of German texts. Henoch feared using third-hand information that contained transliteration problems. Her suspicions were further aroused after it became clear the German service itself doubted CURVEBALL’s reliability.

The intelligence backstory needs a brief sketch here because it bears on the question of CURVEBALL’s veracity. Alwan arrived in Munich from North Africa in November 1999, requesting political asylum. That automatically led to interviews with authorities and vetting by the German foreign intelligence service *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (BND). It was the BND to whom he told his tale of Iraqi weapons plants. That service in turn shared its reporting with the DIA in the Spring of 2000. The DIA subsequently shared the information with CIA.

The CIA’s Directorate of Operations is responsible for all intelligence collection of this type, and the presence of this source in Germany placed responsibility with the European Division chief, Tyler Drumheller. In his memoir, Drumheller recounts that he first heard of CURVEBALL in the fall of 2002 and made inquiries with the German liaison representative in Washington, who privately warned him of doubts about the source. Both John McLaughlin and George Tenet, in statements made after publication of the Drumheller memoir, deny that anyone made them aware of BND doubts on CURVEBALL in late September or October, when the division chief asserts that this exchange took place. Tenet in his own memoir adds that the BND representative, asked several years later about his 2002 meeting with Drumheller, denied having called CURVEBALL a fabricator, simply warning that he was a single source whose information could not be verified. ([Note 7](#))

According to various sources, by late December the CIA was making official inquiries of the BND as to whether the U.S.—and the White House—could use the material. Drumheller’s aide, Margaret Henoch,

expressed her own concerns in an e-mail circulated within CIA headquarters. Deputy Director of Central Intelligence John McLaughlin ordered subordinates to meet and reconcile their positions on CURVEBALL and his information. Analysts at CIA's prime analytical unit in this area, the Weapons, Intelligence, Nonproliferation, and Arms Control Center (WINPAC) criticized the Directorate of Operations for questioning this information. WINPAC had already used it for its contributions to the October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraqi weapons programs and by now had a stake in CURVEBALL's veracity. (Note 8) The meeting resulted in an impasse between CIA officers from the different units.

On December 20 a cable from the CIA station chief in Berlin arrived at headquarters. It contained a letter to Director Tenet from BND President August Henning saying that CURVEBALL refused to go public himself, and reiterating that BND would not permit direct American access to the source. According to Tenet, the cable went to Drumheller and was never forwarded to the CIA director. The station chief's requests for a reply went unanswered. Tenet writes, "I had never seen the German letter but had simply been told that the German BND had cleared our use of the Curve Ball material." (Note 9)

Division chief Drumheller raised the CURVEBALL credibility issue again in January after seeing a draft of the Bush State of the Union address with its claim of Iraqi mobile weapons plants. According to his account, he spoke to colleagues at the CIA's Counterproliferation Division, wondering what data other than the exile's reporting WINPAC might have to back such a claim, only to be assured there was none. Drumheller had Henoch prepare an e-mail for McLaughlin's executive assistant summarizing the problems with the CURVEBALL information, and notes that McLaughlin later queried WINPAC's senior analyst on this subject about the questions raised. Drumheller indicates that the CIA deputy director received "robust assurances." (Note 10) Drumheller also told the Silberman-Robb Commission that he had attempted to delete the passage about the mobile weapons plants from the State of the Union speech.

According to Drumheller, he asked to see McLaughlin directly. "To my astonishment," Drumheller recounts, "he appeared to have no idea that there were any problems with Curveball. 'Oh my! I hope that's not true,' he said, after I outlined the issues and said the source was probably a fabricator." (Note 11) McLaughlin, in his statement in response (see below), repeatedly declares that "no one stepped forward" to object, and that "I am equally at a loss to understand why they [CIA officers] passed up so many opportunities in the weeks prior to and after the Powell speech" to warn about CURVEBALL. McLaughlin did not say anything in his statement about a specific meeting with Drumheller, and he told the Silberman-Robb Commission that he was not aware of the CIA meeting that discussed CURVEBALL'S bona fides even though it was called by his own executive assistant, chaired by that officer, and though the executive assistant afterwards wrote a memorandum summarizing the meeting that was circulated to participants. McLaughlin says he never saw a meeting record. He also did not recall seeing Drumheller, and apparently no meeting with Drumheller was noted on McLaughlin's daily calendar. Other CIA officials, however, recall hearing the result of the meeting at the time, and apparently exchanges of emails involved more than one of McLaughlin's assistants. And McLaughlin told the Silberman-Robb Commission that he *did* meet the WINPAC analyst to hear her assurances. (Note 12)

The sessions at CIA headquarters where the Powell speech itself was vetted involved both John McLaughlin and George Tenet, as well as McLaughlin's executive assistant, who is recorded at one point asking for more assurances from CIA's Berlin station chief on the CURVEBALL material. Throughout the period, Berlin's responses were instead cautionary.

Finally it all came down to the night before Powell's speech. Powell and Tenet were already in New York engaging in final rehearsals. That night there was a phone call between Tenet and Drumheller. Both individuals at least agree that a conversation took place, though Tenet remembers an evening call where he merely asked for a phone number, while Drumheller says he specifically warned Tenet against using the CURVEBALL material and the director replied something like, "yeah, yeah." ([Note 13](#)) The next day Powell went ahead with the allegations. Tenet had not taken any of CURVEBALL's claims out of the speech.

At the CIA's Counterproliferation Division, where officers sat rapt before the television watching Powell speak, with Tenet seated behind him, there was dismay on several counts. One of them was CURVEBALL. Valerie Plame Wilson recounts, "Although an official 'burn notice' . . . did not go out until June 2004, it was widely known that CURVEBALL was not a credible source and that there were serious problems with his reporting." ([Note 14](#))

Whatever else may be the case, it is clear that questions *were* raised about CURVEBALL—and they surfaced before his information was used to buttress the case for war with Iraq. The statements by CIA senior officers Tenet and McLaughlin are difficult to reconcile with the other evidence. At a minimum they failed to resolve questions regarding CURVEBALL's authenticity, and permitted Powell to step onto a world stage with flimsy evidence.

Worse, more doubts about this intelligence were expressed immediately *after* the Powell speech that are also not reflected by the Tenet and McLaughlin statements in 2005. Furthermore, Tenet presided over the publication of a "white paper" in May 2003, written jointly by the CIA and DIA, which claimed that mobile weapons laboratories had actually been found in Iraq. That paper was demonstrably false on the basis of purely technical observations, ([Note 15](#)) and the attribution to CURVEBALL and several other hearsay sources was the same as in Powell's speech. Within days the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research objected to the characterization of the trailers found as weapons labs, and they would be proved right. Tenet specifically denies learning anything about the discrepancies in CURVEBALL's claims until early 2004.

Read the Documents

Note: The following documents are in PDF format.
You will need to download and install the free [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#) to view.

[Document 1: Powell Speech](#) (See also [Powell slideshow presentation](#))

Source: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/print/20030205-1.html>

Secretary of State Colin Powell's United Nations address in February 2003 is generally viewed as one of the Bush administration's most effective public steps in winning media and public support for war. Discussing Iraq's bio-weapons programs, he does not name

CURVEBALL, but he cites an Iraqi defector whose “eye-witness account of these mobile production facilities has been corroborated by other sources.” Senior CIA officials, including then-Deputy Director for Operations James Pavitt and European operations chief Tyler Drumheller, reported later that they had previously raised objections to the use of CURVEBALL’s information, but were surprised to find, on the eve of Powell’s remarks, that the Iraqi source had resurfaced. (A case in point was that of Margaret Henoch, CIA’s Central Group Chief, who was mentioned in the *60 Minutes* report.)

Document 2: SSCI report (1) July 7, 2004

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence published this initial report in July 2004 focusing on what the U.S. knew about Iraq prior to the war. The heavily excised excerpt reproduced here illustrates how much information remains closed to outside scrutiny. What is accessible shows that some U.S. intelligence officials considered CURVEBALL’s information problematic from the beginning, at least in part because of translation issues (he spoke in English and Arabic, translated into German and then back into English), and other “reporting inconsistencies.” (Because of blacked out text, it is unclear whether analysts identified this as a problem at the time.) What’s more, the lone American official to meet CURVEBALL before the invasion worried that he might be an alcoholic—and was not even sure the source “was who he said he was.”

Document 3: WMD Commission Report

This excerpt of the so-called Silberman-Robb Commission, created by President Bush, focuses on Iraq’s biological warfare capabilities and places heavy blame on the intelligence community for having “seriously misjudged” that potential. The “primary reason for this misjudgment” was an over-reliance on CURVEBALL. Among other things, the excerpt cites CIA European operations division chief Tyler Drumheller’s account of meetings related to the issue that were held in January 2003 with CIA Director George Tenet and Deputy Director John McLaughlin, as well as e-mails and interviews from CIA officials aware of those meetings, and the dramatic February 4 phone call between the division chief and Tenet. The sessions, according to Drumheller, took place after he brought up German concerns over CURVEBALL’s reliability. Tenet and McLaughlin, however, denied any prior knowledge of these events a few days after the report was published. In his book, *On the Brink*, Drumheller asserts “there is a pile of documents two feet high backing up my story” (p. 205).

Document 4: McLaughlin Statement

Source: http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/wmd_mclaughlin.html

John McLaughlin, former Deputy Director of the CIA, issued this statement on April 1, 2005, denying he had any knowledge of CURVEBALL’s status as a potential fabricator until late 2003. However, European division chief Tyler Drumheller has contended that he notified his superiors in October 2002 of the German government’s suspicions concerning the source, and then contacted McLaughlin’s office directly on the matter in January 2003.

Document 5: Tenet Statement

CIA Director George Tenet’s April 1, 2005 statement is his official denial of any knowledge concerning the mental instability or unreliable nature of CURVEBALL and the untrustworthiness of the intelligence he provided. He claims that he did not learn about any of these allegations until the publication of the Silberman-Robb

Commission's report on March 31, 2005.

Document 6: SSCI (2) September 8, 2006

This report, the second by the Senate intelligence committee on prewar Iraq intelligence, includes information not available to the committee during its preparation of the earlier, July 2004, report. In the section on biological weapons, the later report discusses the conclusions of the Iraq Survey Group (ISG) at length, as well as the Silberman-Robb Commission report. Referring to CURVEBALL, the ISG, according to the Senate committee, "harbor[ed] severe doubts about the source's credibility."

Notes

1. *60 Minutes*, scheduled for broadcast November 4, 2007, reported by Bob Simon. In Bob Drogin's book *Curveball: Spies, Lies, and the Con Man Who Caused a War* (New York: Random House, 2007), the identity of the source is reported as Ahmed Hassan Mohammed, but the author notes that is not his real name. This text uses the Alwan identity put forward by CBS.

2. "Faulty Intel Source 'Curve Ball' Revealed," CBSNews.com, Downloaded 11/2/07, 4:15 p.m. from www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/11/01/60minutes/main3440577.shtml.

3. Secretary Colin L. Powell, "Remarks to the United Nations Security Council," February 5, 2003 (Document 1 below).

4. "Report to the President of the United States" by The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, March 31, 2005; and "Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq" by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, September 8, 2006.

5. The most recent account is in Karen DeYoung, *Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell*. (New York: Knopf, 2006), pp. 439-446.

6. The following account draws from the memoir of CIA European division chief Tyler Drumheller with Elaine Monaghan, *On the Brink: An Insider's Account of How the White House Compromised American Intelligence*. (New York: Carol & Graf, 2006), journalist Bob Drogin (*Curveball*), and my own book *Hoodwinked: The Documents that Reveal How Bush Sold Us a War* (New York: New Press, 2004).

7. George J. Tenet with Bill Harlow, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), p. 379.

8. WINPAC appears to have taken a position similar to that of the Defense Intelligence Agency, whose view is that analysts are solely responsible for judging the *bona fides* of a source — essentially that if the information tracks with other material then the source is judged to be valid.

9. Tenet, op. cit., p. 379.

10. Drumheller, p. 85.

11. Ibid., p. 83.

12. Silberman-Robb Commission, pp. 96-103.

13. Ibid., quoted p. 104.

14. Valerie Plame Wilson, *Fair Game: My Life as a Spy, My Betrayal by the White House*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 128.

15. Prados, *Hoodwinked*, pp. 283-286. Additional detailed critiques on the mobile biological weapons production capacity assertions have been made by Dr. Milton Leitenberg and are available from the Federation of American Scientists, in '[Unresolved Questions Regarding US Government Attribution of a Mobile Biological Production Capacity by Iraq](#)', '[Further Information Regarding US Government Attribution of a Mobile Biological Production Capacity by Iraq](#)' and '[Part III](#)' of same.

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