



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on February 17, 2011

Defector Admits Lying Extensively About Iraq's Alleged WMD

The tales Janabi wove about Saddam Hussein's supposed mobile biological weapons program formed the basis of much of then-U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's 2003 presentation to the United Nations Security Council in which he laid out the case for war against Iraq, saying:

We have firsthand descriptions of biological weapons factories on wheels and on rails....



The source was an eyewitness, an Iraqi chemical engineer who supervised one of these facilities. He was present during biological agent production runs. He was also at the site when an accident occurred in 1998. Twelve technicians died.

He reported that when UNSCOM was in the country and inspecting, the biological weapons agent production always began on Thursdays at midnight because Iraq thought UNSCOM would not inspect on the Muslim Holy Day, Thursday night through Friday. He added that this was important because the units could not be broken down in the middle of a production run, which had to be completed by Friday evening before the inspectors might arrive again.

In fact, says the *Guardian*, "everything [Janabi] had said about the inner workings of Saddam Hussein's biological weapons program was a flight of fantasy," yet the U.S. government swallowed it whole despite the fact that prior to Powell's speech, according to Janabi, "he had not met a U.S. official, let alone been interviewed by one." (At the time he was living in Germany, having been granted asylum; he and his family, with an assist from the BND, have since become German citizens and have remained in the country.) Moreover, Janabi had already been exposed as a liar in 2000, so any allegations he made should have been considered highly suspect. Nevertheless, there was Powell, telling the entire world that Iraq was teeming with weapons of mass destruction, using "diagrams that [Janabi] knew had been prepared from his fraudulent descriptions." The paper aptly dubs Janabi's snow job "one of the greatest confidence tricks in the history of modern intelligence."

The path to success was, however, made much smoother for Janabi by the fact that the Bush administration, along with the government of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, so desperately wanted to find an excuse to invade Iraq that it grasped at the flimsiest of straws that could be used to build its case. It is known, for example, that both the [U.S.](#) and [U.K.](#) governments tried to provoke Saddam into firing the first shot in the war and that the Blair government had, in the words of BBC correspondent Andrew Gilligan, "[sexed up](#)" its intelligence dossier supposedly proving the existence of Iraq's WMD incontrovertibly. As the so-called [Downing Street Memo](#) put it, "the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy." A ready-made source of such phony intelligence was simply too good to pass



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up.

That these governments were looking for “facts” to support their war policy is evident from Janabi’s statements to the *Guardian*. Janabi says that he “thought his story about the mobile trucks had been discounted” in 2000 after both German and British intelligence confronted him with evidence to contradict his assertions, at which point he readily admitted he had been wrong. He did not speak to his handlers again until May 2002, when they began asking him questions unrelated to the alleged mobile biological weapons labs. Then, in January 2003, they suddenly began questioning him about the mobile labs again — “the first time they had talked to me about this since 2000,” Janabi said. The paper writes that Janabi “says it was clear to him that the drums of war were beating ever louder” at that time. The next month everything Janabi had related about the supposed mobile labs showed up in Powell’s speech.

What else can one conclude but that the American and British governments sought out Janabi’s “intelligence” to bolster their case for war, ignoring all evidence to the contrary? They were certainly not above using other suspect intelligence for the same purpose, such as the obviously phony documents that supposedly proved that [Saddam had sought to purchase yellowcake uranium from Niger](#).

Further evidence that this is precisely what happened has been provided by [Tyler Drumheller](#), who was the chief of CIA covert operations in Europe at the time of Powell’s presentation. Drumheller, who also [saw through the yellowcake documents and reported that Iraq had no WMD program](#), told the *Guardian* that “right up to the night of Powell’s speech” he had been warning then-CIA Director George Tenet that Janabi’s intelligence was unreliable but (obviously) was ignored.

The newspaper adds:

[Drumheller] recalled a conversation he had with John McLaughlin, then the CIA’s deputy director. “The week before the speech, I talked to the Deputy McLaughlin, and someone says to him, ‘Tyler’s worried that Curveball might be a fabricator.’ And McLaughlin said, ‘Oh, I hope not, because this is really all we have.’ And I said, and I’ve got to be honest with you, I said: ‘You’ve got to be kidding? This is all we have!’”

Asked whether Powell ... could have made a public case for war without Curveball, he said: “Not at the time they did ... it would have been a lot less dramatic and there would have been a lot more debate in Congress in the U.S. than if you have a source who says, for example, they can drop anthrax over the city of London.”

Tenet has denied that Drumheller ever made an official warning to CIA headquarters, insisting that he only found out about Janabi’s unreliability in 2005. Powell, meanwhile, is [calling for an investigation](#) into why the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency failed to inform him of Janabi’s unreliability prior to his speech.

The use of defector intelligence with no corroboration is not accepted practice at intelligence agencies, [argues Carne Ross](#). Ross, who says he “was Britain’s Iraq expert at the U.N. Security Council and responsible for liaison with the weapons inspectors” during the years just prior to the Iraq war, writes that because “defectors had a powerful incentive to exaggerate the nature of Iraq’s development of WMD,” they were considered “the least convincing sources” of intelligence. Therefore, their allegations, as with all other intelligence, were always “subjected to rigorous cross-checking before inclusion in overall analyses.” “In the years I worked on the subject (1997-2002),” Ross maintains, “the picture



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produced by this method was very clear: there was no credible evidence of substantial stocks of WMD in Iraq.”

Ross continues:

And it was this method — clearly — that was abandoned in advance of the war. Instead of a careful cross-checking of evidence, reports that suited the story of an imminent Iraqi threat were picked out, polished and formed the basis of public claims like Colin Powell’s presentation to the U.N. Security Council, or the No. 10 dossier. This was exactly how a false case for war was constructed: not by the deliberate creation of a falsehood, but by willfully and secretly manipulating the evidence to exaggerate the importance of reports like Curveball’s, and to ignore contradictory evidence. This was a subtle process, elaborated from report to report, in such a way that allowed officials themselves to believe that they were not deliberately lying — more editing, perhaps, or simplifying for public presentation.

... Others of my former colleagues in the [Ministry of Defense] and Foreign Office have freely admitted to me that this is precisely what took place. Yet, for all its subtlety and secrecy, we should name this process for what it was: the manufacture of a lie.

It is probably too much to expect any Bush or Blair administration officials to pay the price for their deliberate deceit. Indeed, as Ross points out, “We can expect that those who constructed it — Tony Blair, Dick Cheney et al. — will now amend their usual arguments to suggest that they were innocently misled by evidence such as Curveball’s.” They will also no doubt fall back on the old standby that the world is better off without Saddam — something that Curveball himself is counting on to salvage his reputation, telling the *Guardian* that while he is “very sad” about the tens of thousands of Iraqis civilians who have been killed as a direct result of his lies, “there was no other way to bring about freedom to Iraq.”

Curveball, have you seen any news out of Egypt lately?



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