



Statement of John E. McLaughlin

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April 1, 2005

I did not know prior to Secretary Powell's UN speech that some of the information used in the biological weapons (BW) section was the product of a likely fabricator, as suggested by some of the testimony discussed in the Silberman-Robb Commission Report. I would never have permitted the use of such material by the Secretary had I known this. In fact, much of our time in the run-up to the speech was spent taking out material, including much that had been added by the policy community after the draft left the Agency, that we and the Secretary's staff judged to have been unreliable.

With hindsight and the benefit of on-the-ground investigation in Iraq, we now know that the specific material in question - reporting from a source code-named Curveball, who alleged mobile production of BW was underway - cannot be substantiated. It is difficult to reconstruct every moment of deliberation during the tumultuous period leading up to the Iraq war, but my predominant memory regarding this reporting is of receiving assurances at the time that the information was credible.

I was told that the source had produced close to a hundred reports - many highly technical in nature. The processes he described had been assessed by an independent laboratory as workable engineering designs. The UN had earlier come upon documentary evidence suggesting Iraq was contemplating mobile production of BW. Although we did not have direct access to the source, who was handled by a foreign intelligence service, that service had joined US Intelligence Community officers and representatives of two other foreign intelligence services in a quadrilateral conference in 2001 which had judged the reporting credible. Finally, the foreign service handling the source had granted permission to cite the information publicly, indicating, we thought, that it must have confidence in the reporting. These are the main things I remember from discussions at the time.

The Commission reports that several Agency officers say they had serious doubts about this reporting at the time and sought to raise them with Agency leadership. Let me state unequivocally that if someone had made these doubts clear to me, I would not have permitted the reporting to be used in Secretary Powell's speech. Regarding a reported meeting in which an Agency division chief is said to have told me in late January 2003 that Curveball might be a fabricator, I have absolutely no recall of such a discussion. None. Such a meeting does not appear on my calendar, nor was this view transmitted to me in writing.

I am at a loss to explain why accounts of this period vary so sharply. But if officers had confident knowledge of the source's unreliability, I am equally at a loss to understand why they passed up so many opportunities in the weeks prior to and after the Powell speech to highlight it and bring it forward.

- If a representative of the foreign service had indicated in late September/early October that the source could be a fabricator - as the Commission report suggests -- this should have been written up immediately as a formal notice and some or all of the reporting withdrawn. If this had been done, it would have been unavoidably clear to all concerned that there was a problem, possibly even before the National Intelligence Estimate was published in early October. This is how our system is supposed to work. This did not happen.
- Thus, in early October, in the same time frame that the foreign service representative is said to have labeled Curveball a possible fabricator, the Intelligence Community's National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq drew heavily on this reporting. No one stepped forward to caution against this either before, during, or after preparation of the Estimate.

- Numerous briefings were prepared during the Fall drawing on the Estimate's material derived from this source. It was widely understood that these briefings were taking place, but again no one stepped forward to object.
- Following the Powell speech in early February and all the attendant publicity, no one came to me or the DCI to say that the material on mobile BW production from this source was not reliable.
- No one stepped forward to say that Curveball was a fabricator while CIA and DIA were preparing a White Paper in the Spring of 2003 on the mysterious trailers found in northern Iraq that resembled the units Curveball had described. When photos of the trailers were shown to Curveball to seek his reaction, no one, to my knowledge, counseled against this on the grounds that he might be a fabricator - neither Agency officers who oversaw the process nor the foreign service that had to facilitate Curveball's access to this material.
- As doubts grew about Curveball's information, the Agency engaged in strenuous and ultimately successful efforts to gain direct access to Curveball in order to settle the issue. In the course of this, no one came forward to suggest that this was not worth doing. In other words, no one said the case should have been closed earlier because the source was a fabricator - neither Agency officers nor the foreign service involved.
- No one brought internal operational traffic on this matter to the attention of myself or the DCI until late 2003 or early 2004 when an e-mail expressing skepticism about Curveball from a detailee who met him came to light in the course of internal reviews commissioned by the Deputy Director for Intelligence. This e-mail was written in February 2003, and anyone wishing earnestly to impress us with doubts about Curveball could have simply laid this on our desks at any time. This did not happen.