

Analysis of Secretary of State Powell's "Remarks to The United Nations Security Council", 5 February 2003 (Draft). Glen Rangwala, University of Cambridge, U.K.

This is very much a first response, and I don't answer all of the 25 distinct points that I counted Powell as substantiating in his speech. I've started off with general comments, then try to address some of the 25 points (and list the others), then pick up briefly on some minor points.

Secretary of State Powell to Security Council, 5 February 2003

The main points I'd make about the Powell presentation are:

(a) He makes strong claims about Iraq's retention and development of non-conventional weapons, but the claims that he provides substantive evidence for are either tangential or the evidence is ambiguous.

An example would be how Powell claimed: "We know that Saddam's son, Qusay, ordered the removal of all prohibited weapons from Saddam's numerous palace complexes ... We also have satellite photos that indicate that banned materials have recently been moved from a number of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction facilities." If Powell had been able to show any evidence for either of these claims, that would have constituted much more plausible proof of the US claims.

However, instead of providing proof of any of those claims, Powell instead produced photos of al-Taji ammunition storage facility that shows a small shed and a truck adjacent to the bunker. Powell claimed that these are "a signature item" for chemical bunkers. This seems on the face of it to be a wholly implausible claim: a picture of a truck and a shed by themselves reveal nothing about the contents of the adjacent bunker.

In summary, Powell didn't provide evidence for the stronger claims that he made, instead displaying a satellite photo that reveals very little. This would indicate that the evidence for the stronger claims is either non-existent or contentious.

(b) The recordings only seem to show is that Iraq didn't want its 7 December declaration to be found to be inadequate, not that it was trying to conceal weapons. The two are very different sorts of activities.

According to SCR 687 / 1441, the unilateral destruction of prohibited weapons and their remnants is prohibited. However, if the concern is more with Iraq's retention of weapons than formal observance of the terms of SC resolutions, then Iraq's attempts to dispose of any remaining parts of chemical rockets should not be interpreted as equivalent in security terms to retaining stocks of weapons.

(c) Powell claimed the US had evidence of prohibited weapons at certain sites, but that Iraq moved them whilst inspectors were in the country to conceal them. Powell took this as evidence of Iraqi violation of SCR 1441.

For example, Powell claimed that the material at al-Taji store was moved on 22 December 2002. The question then becomes why didn't the US then provide this information to the inspectors as soon as they entered Iraq (27 November), who could have verified those claims, before the material was allegedly moved? Why did the US not allow an independent inspectorate to check its allegations about the contents of al-Taji, if they were genuine in their beliefs?

(d) There is a very strong reliance upon Iraqi defectors. This is a notoriously unreliable source, and many of the claims of the same defectors that Powell implicitly refers to have since been shown to be inaccurate.

An example would be the claims of Adnan Saeed al-Haideri, who Powell refers to without naming him (as an "Iraqi civil engineer"). Haideri did not make any claims about mobile production facilities in his first press conferences in December 2001. It was only after debriefing by the US and a three-week "debriefing" by Nabil Musawi, spokesman for the opposition Iraqi National Congress, in Bangkok, that Haideri started talking about mobile facilities, in mid-2002.

In general, Powell makes some plausible claims that Iraq has not stood by the letter of the law in all respects. However, he does not show that Iraq has developed weapons on any scale, or that it has the potential to threaten Iraq's own people or its neighbours, much less the US. Nor does he show that Iraq may be able to develop its non-conventional capacity if weapons inspectors continue their work in Iraq.

The claims by Powell in order:

1. A recording of a conversation of 26/11/02 between two senior officers in which al-Kindi company was said to have been "evacuated".

The sound quality of this recording is very poor, and I'm unable to hear the word used, that Powell translates as "evacuated".

2. A recording of a conversation of 20/1/03 in which two officers are discussing "forbidden ammo": there are orders to "clean out all the areas, the scrap areas, the abandoned areas".

This seems more to be about making sure that the weapons inspectors don't find any material that is undeclared in the 7 December 2002 statement. The officers talk about "the possibility there is, by chance, forbidden ammo": in other words, like Unmovic found rockets on 16 January (4 days prior to the conversation). The officers seem to be stating that they need to make sure that they have disposed of any such material, not the transfer of known stores away from Unmovic's reach.

3. al-Taji munitions facility. Powell's photos of this facility show a small shed and a truck adjacent to the bunker. Powell claimed that these are "a signature item" for chemical bunkers.

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al-Taji was evacuated, according to Powell, on 22 December 2002. The question then becomes why didn't the US then provide this information to the inspectors as soon as they entered Iraq (27 November), who could have verified those claims, before the material was allegedly moved? Why did the US not allow an independent inspectorate to check its allegations about the contents of al-Taji, if they were genuine in their beliefs?

4. Powell claimed an unnamed ballistic missiles site was evacuated in November 2002, using large cargo trucks.

5. Iraq has prevented U-2 aerial reconnaissance flights.

6. Iraq has prevented interviews with its personnel.

Here, the US again is relying on allegations that it has not demonstrated. Powell claimed that the Iraq government insists on a minder being present; has threatened scientists with death if they revealed sensitive information; indicated that anyone who left Iraq to be interviewed would be treated as a spy; created false death certificates; and placed scientists under house arrest. None of these claims have been backed up with any substantive evidence at all by the US.

7. Iraq has not provided an adequate list of its scientists.

Iraq provided lists of 117 persons for the chemical sector, 120 for the biological sector and 156 persons for the missile sector by the end of December 2002. Powell contrasted Iraq's position with the list that UNSCOM compiled of 3500 names.

However, Hans Blix had himself suggested that Iraq should give sets of names in stages: "Iraq may proceed in pyramid fashion, starting from the leadership in programmes, going down to management, scientists, engineers and technicians but excluding the basic layer of workers." (statement to the Security Council, 19 December 2002). If Powell has a problem with Blix's way of working, he should raise those issues for the Council to discuss with Blix.

8. Iraq's alleged biological weapons stockpile.

Powell made the claim: "Less than a teaspoon of dry anthrax, a little bit -- about this amount. This is just about the amount of a teaspoon. Less than a teaspoon full of dry anthrax in an envelope shut down the United States Senate in the fall of 2001 [...] And Saddam Hussein has not verifiably accounted for even one teaspoonful of this deadly material."

The problem for Powell is that there is no evidence that Iraq did, or could, produce dried anthrax. It is known to have produced only wet anthrax agents. There have been allegations that Iraq was researching drying technologies for anthrax. In particular, *Bacillus thuringiensis* spores - a close relation to anthrax spores - were tested on a spray dryer in December 1989, according to UNSCOM. However, there has been no evidence that anthrax spores were themselves ever dried by Iraq, and it is unclear if Iraq ever obtained suitable drying equipment for itself.

A full review of the evidence about Iraq's anthrax is at:  
<http://middleeastreference.org.uk/iraqweapons.html#bexista>

9. Mobile biological production facilities. Powell discussed the claims of 4 defectors.

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An example would be the claims of Adnan Saeed al-Haideri, who Powell refers to without naming him (as an "Iraqi civil engineer"). Haideri did not make any claims about mobile production facilities in his first press conferences in December 2001. It was only after debriefing by the US and a three-week "debriefing" by Nabil Musawi, spokesman for the opposition Iraqi National Congress, in Bangkok, that Haideri started talking about mobile facilities, in mid-2002.

Furthermore, many of the stationary sites Saeed claimed were engaged in the production of biological weapons have since been inspected by Unmovic. A review in brief is at:

<http://middleeastreference.org.uk/iraqweapons.html#bprodstat>

10. Iraq's biological research developments. Powell attributes various claims to sources that do not, it seems, make these claims.

"By 1998, UN experts agreed that the Iraqis had perfected drying techniques for their biological weapons programs. ... We know from Iraq's past admissions that it has successfully weaponized not only anthrax, but also other biological agents including botulinum toxin, aflatoxin and ricin. Saddam Hussein has [...] the wherewithal to develop smallpox."

Firstly, the UN never concluded that Iraq had perfected drying techniques, merely that there was experimentation with *Bacillus thuringiensis* spores in 1989. Secondly, Iraq did not admit to having successfully weaponized ricin: it only admits to attempting field trials using 155mm artillery shells in November 1990. Finally, the claim about smallpox seems inapposite: unless Iraq had been able to preserve live smallpox virus from the early 1970s, it must have imported it: the only known stocks are in Russia and the US, and there is no indication these stocks have been compromised.

11. Iraq's biological weapons sprayers.

12. Chemical weapons stockpile. Powell referred to

(a) 550 artillery shells with mustard.

Iraq declared that it filled approximately 13,000 artillery shells with mustard prior to 1991. UNSCOM accounted for 12,792 of these shells, and destroyed them in the period of 1992-94. However, Iraq also declared that 550 mustard-filled artillery shells had been lost in the aftermath of the Gulf War. The extent to which these - if they still existed - could constitute an ongoing

danger should be assessed in light of the need to deploy large amounts of mustard for effective use.

Mustard has a low volume-to-effectiveness ratio. As the International Institute for Strategic Studies record in the strategic dossier of September 2002, at p.43:

"large amounts of mustard are necessary for effective military operations. Roughly, one tonne of agent is needed to effectively contaminate 2.6 square kilometres of territory, if properly disseminated."

(b) enough precursors to increase his stockpile to as much as 500 tons of chemical agents.

UNSCOM did recognise that it was unable to account for the balance between the precursor chemicals that Iraq is known to have had in 1991, and those that were verifiably destroyed. The total declared by Iraq - either produced by Iraq or imported - amounted to some 20,150 tonnes. Of these, 14,500 tonnes were used for the production of chemical weapons or for producing other precursors (leaving a balance of 5,650 tonnes unused for this purpose). Iraq further declared that it had in January 1991 a total of 3,915 tonnes of precursors left from the original 20,150 tonnes, with the discrepancy of 1,735 tonnes lost as a result of unsuitable storage, leaks, spillages etc.

Out of the 3,915 tonnes that Iraq claimed it still had in January 1991, UNSCOM accounted for 2,850 tonnes. The remainder was declared by Iraq either as having been destroyed unilaterally (242 tonnes) or having been destroyed during the Gulf War (823 tonnes). Iraq includes in the first of those categories - unilateral destruction in mid-1991 - all precursor chemicals for VX.

UNSCOM's assessment for each relevant precursor chemical that Iraq held in January 1991 is in Appendix II, para.22 of its January 1999 report. For some precursor chemicals, UNSCOM was able to account for the entire quantity held by Iraq; but with a number of other chemicals (such as dimethylaminohydrochloride, for the production of tabun; thionylchloride, for the production of G-agents mustard and VX; MPF and Cyclohexanol for G-agents; P2S5, diisopropyl amine, chloroethanol and choline for VX), UNSCOM was able to verify that destruction of these chemicals had taken place, but was unable to verify the amount. To take the example of dimethylaminohydrochloride, Iraq claimed that it had 295 tonnes in January 1991; but that approximately 30 tonnes were destroyed in the Gulf War. UNSCOM noted that "Evidence of destruction was seen by UNSCOM", but that "Accounting was not possible due to the state of destruction". Separately, 272 tonnes were destroyed under UNSCOM supervision.

Given UNSCOM's inability to discern the quantities of materials destroyed in 1991, it is difficult to see how Iraq could ever verify that this material no longer exists, particularly the material destroyed when the buildings they were in were bombed. It is also difficult to see how the US has arrived at a figure of 500 tonnes of potential production from retained precursors, as this figure is not mentioned in any UNSCOM or UNMOVIC reports.

13. VX. As Powell recorded, Iraq admitted to producing nearly 4 tonnes of VX. It's believed that 1.5 tonnes of these remained in 1991.

In 1998, UNSCOM found VX degradation products on missile warheads, indicating that Iraq had stabilised VX sufficiently and had managed to weaponise it (in contrast to the Government of Iraq's own claims). Two factors would indicate that the 1.5 tonnes of VX nerve agent no longer exist in operational form:

Firstly, Iraq claimed that this quantity of VX was discarded unilaterally by dumping it on the ground. VX degrades rapidly if placed onto concrete (see this report of 15 November 2002). In accordance with Iraq's claim, UNSCOM tested the site at which the VX was reportedly dumped. UNSCOM's January 1999 report states in Appendix II, paragraph 16:

"Traces of one VX-degradation product and a chemical known as a VX-stabilizer were found in the samples taken from the VX dump sites."

However, from this information alone, UNSCOM was not able to make "a quantified assessment"; that is, they were not able to verify that all 1.5 tonnes of the agent had been so destroyed.

Secondly, VX, even if stabilised, degrades. The IISS strategic dossier of September 2002 records the status of VX produced before the Gulf War: "Any VX produced by Iraq before 1991 is likely to have decomposed over the past decade [...]. Any G-agent or V-agent stocks that Iraq concealed from UNSCOM inspections are likely to have deteriorated by now." (pp. 52 and 53).

14. Chemical production facilities. Powell refers specifically to one site, Tariq State Establishment.

It's noticeable that he doesn't refer to any of the sites that the US administration has been referencing since 2001 (Fallujah II, Ibn Sina at Tarmiyya, al-Qa'qa'), given that these have all been inspected by Unmovic, who have found nothing suspicious at any of them.

15. Musayyib transshipment point. Powell claims that chemical weapons were transported to this site, and the topsoil then removed, so as to remove any trace of the weapons.

If Powell really had suspected that chemical weapons were transported through that point, he would have provided that information to Unmovic, who could have conducted tests at that site for chemical residues and vapours. His presentation of the information to the public, prior to possible testing, would indicate that the claims were not being taken seriously.

16. Recording of a discussion of a nerve agent cover-up. This recording features what we are told is a commander saying "remove - the expression - nerve agents" very slowly.

Powell did not reveal when the recording was made ("just a few weeks ago"), nor what the purpose of the conversation was - something that he should have been able to tell from the context of the recording. There is a less threatening interpretation of the discussion: the individuals were drawing up a report, and were discussing the terminology to use. The individuals are explicitly referring to "the expression", not to the items themselves as Powell

suggests in his interpretation.

17. Nuclear scientists. Powell claimed that "over the last 18 months Saddam Hussein has paid increasing personal attention to Iraqis' top nuclear scientists".

This seems to conflict directly with the evidence presented by Mohamed ElBaradei in his update to the Security Council on 27 January 2003, paras.22-23:

"In its CAFCD [Currently Accurate, Full and Complete Declaration, 7 December 2002], Iraq declared that the current and former IAEC sites, as well as the locations to which former IAEC personnel were transferred, are now devoted to the conduct of non-nuclear commercial activities. [...] From the IAEA's assessment to date of the Iraqi declaration, the following conclusions have been drawn: [...] The part of the CAFCD which covers Iraq's programme between 1991 and 1998 is consistent with the conclusions drawn by the IAEA on the basis of its verification activities conducted throughout that period and regularly reported to the Security Council."

18. Aluminium tubes. Powell returns to this one, claiming that the tubes are higher quality than necessary for rockets, and that "they can be adapted for centrifuge use".

Again, ElBaradei's conclusions point in the opposite direction, in his briefing to the Security Council on 9 January 2003 (paras.9-10):

"the IAEA has conducted a series of inspections at sites involved in the production and storage of reverse engineered rockets, held discussions with and interviewed Iraqi personnel, taken samples of aluminium tubes, and begun a review of the documentation provided by Iraq relating to contracts with the traders. While the matter is still under investigation, and further verification is foreseen, the IAEA's analysis to date indicates that the specifications of the aluminium tubes sought by Iraq in 2001 and 2002 appear to be consistent with reverse engineering of rockets. While it would be possible to modify such tubes for the manufacture of centrifuges, they are not directly suitable for it."

19. Magnet production plant. Powell said: "In 1999 and 2000, Iraqi officials negotiated with firms in Romania, India, Russia and Slovenia for the purchase of a magnet production plant. Iraq wanted the plant to produce magnets weighing 20 to 30 grams. That's the same weight as the magnets used in Iraq's gas centrifuge program before the Gulf War. This incident, linked with the tubes, is another indicator of Iraq's attempt to reconstitute its nuclear weapons program."

ElBaradei in his update to the Security Council on 27 January 2003, said at paras.58-59:

"Iraq presented detailed information on a project to construct a facility to produce magnets for the Iraqi missile programme, as well as for industrial applications, and that Iraq had prepared a solicitation of offers, but that the project had been delayed due to 'financial credit arrangements'. Preliminary investigations indicate that the specifications contained in the offer solicitation are consistent with those required for the declared intended uses. However, the IAEA will continue to investigate the matter [...]"

20. Retention of SCUDs. Powell claimed that Iraq retains "a few dozen Scud variant ballistic missiles".

This is unlikely. According to Unscm, by 1997, 817 out of Iraq's known 819 ballistic missiles had been certifiably destroyed. On the worst-case assumption that Iraq has salvaged some of the parts for these missiles and has reconstructed them since 1998, even Charles Duelfer - former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, deputy head of Unscm and strong proponent of an invasion of Iraq - has provided an estimate of only 12 to 14 missiles held by Iraq.

21. Existing missile programmes, missile imports.

Iraqi weapons programme personnel extended the al-Samoud missile range and imported missile engines and raw material to produce solid missile fuel. The Iraqi government acknowledged these transgressions in its December 7 declaration, and since this date has agreed to halt these programs.

22. Production of missiles with a range of greater than 1000km.

Powell's claim rests on a view of developments on al-Rafah / Shahiyat liquid propellant engine static test stand. However, these sites have been repeatedly visited by UNMOVIC since the very first day of inspections, 27 November 2002. The relevant excerpt of the UNMOVIC / IAEA report of 21 January 2003 read:

"Another missile team traveled to the Shahiyat Test Facility, about 100 km north of Baghdad, to verify that this site was still abandoned."

23. Terrorism - Palestinian groups.

24. Terrorism - Zarqawi and al-Qa'ida.

Many of the claims are about how an operative of Ansar al-Islam was in Baghdad. Powell need not stop there. The head of Ansar al-Islam, Mullah Krekar (Najm al-Din Faraj) is currently living freely in Norway.

<http://newsobserver.com/24hour/world/story/716951p-5262639c.html>

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/2713749.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2713749.stm)

<http://middleeastreference.org.uk/iraqiopposition.html#ansar>

The US has not requested his arrest. If Iraq is guilty of occasional meetings with second-level al-Qa'ida operatives, then what is the Norwegian government guilty of?

25. Human rights abuses. Indeed.

A few further comments:



Powell: "I asked for this session today for two purposes: First, to support the core assessments made by Dr. Blix and Dr. ElBaradei. [...] And as Dr. ElBaradei reported, Iraq's declaration of December 7, 'did not provide any new information relevant to certain questions that have been outstanding since 1998.'"

Powell misses out the next part of ElBaradei's quote, where he explains what the "certain questions" are: "Iraq's progress prior to 1991 related to weapons design and centrifuge development". ElBaradei summarises: "While these questions do not constitute unresolved disarmament issues, they nevertheless need further clarification."

ElBaradei's core assessment was that "we have to date found no evidence that Iraq has revived its nuclear weapons programme since the elimination of the programme in the 1990s. However, our work is steadily progressing and should be allowed to run its natural course. With our verification system now in place, barring exceptional circumstances, and provided there is sustained proactive cooperation by Iraq, we should be able within the next few months to provide credible assurance that Iraq has no nuclear weapons programme. These few months would be a valuable investment in peace because they could help us avoid a war. We trust that we will continue to have your support as we make every effort to verify Iraq's nuclear disarmament through peaceful means, and to demonstrate that the inspection process can and does work, as a central feature of the international nuclear arms control regime." (his concluding words). Mr Powell shows no sign of supporting that core assessment.

Powell: "Dr. Blix pronounced the 12,200-page declaration rich in volume but poor in information and practically devoid of new evidence."

Blix made this statement to the Security Council on 9 January 2003. He seemed to revise, and in some ways reverse, this judgement in his statement to the Security Council on 27 January 2003:

"In the fields of missiles and biotechnology, the declaration contains a good deal of new material and information covering the period from 1998 and onward. This is welcome."