

A DOCUMENTARY BY MATTHIAS BITTNER



WAR OF LIES

this war's going to happen
regardless of what Curveball said or didn't say,

the codename
"CURVE BALL"

We know they have
weapons of mass destruction.

(Secretary Rumsfeld, September 26, 2002)

Secretary Powell's speech, was incorrect.

U.S. intelligence

PRESS KIT

PRODUCER **PAUL ZISCHLER** AND **SUSANNE MANN** ASSOCIATE PRODUCER **LENA KRAEBER** CO-PRODUCER **PHILIPP KNAUSS** AND **MATTHIAS DRESCHER** DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY **JULIA SCHLINGMANN**
EDITOR **FRIEDEMANN SCHMIDT** ORIGINAL MUSIC **PHILIPP KOBILKE** SOUND DESIGN **FREDERIK PFEIFFER** AND **DAVID LACKOVIC** RE-RECORDING MIXER **GREGOR BONSE**
COLOR GRADING **FABIAN SPANG** COMMISSIONING EDITOR **KAI HENKEL** AND **CLAUDIA GLADZIEJEWSKI** WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY **MATTHIAS BITTNER**

A PRODUCTION OF **ZISCHLERMANN FILMPRODUKTION GMBH** IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH **FILMAKADEMIE BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG**, **FFL GMBH & CO. KG**, **SWR** AND **BR**

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CONTENTS

SYNOPSIS Page 3

TECHNICAL DATA /CREW/WORLD SALES Page 4

DIRECTOR'S NOTE Page 5

TEAM INFO Page 6

PRODUCTION COMPANY Page 8

STILLS Page 9

CONTACT DETAILS Page 10

SYNOPSIS

“The source was an eyewitness, an Iraqi chemical engineer who supervised one of these facilities. He was actually present during biological agent production runs.”

US Secretary of State Colin Powell, while justifying Operation Iraqi Freedom at the United Nations plenary session, February 5, 2003

Today it is common knowledge that the Second Iraq War was based on a lie. There were no weapons of mass destruction. The “source” that Secretary Powell referenced now lives in Germany. His name is Rafed Ahmed Alwan, though he is also known as “Curveball.” The information he provided about portable weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) passed through the hands of several intelligence agencies, including the BND (Germany), MI6 (Great Britain), and the CIA (United States), before it finally made it into Powell’s infamous speech. Suddenly, an Iraqi refugee became a key instigator of the Iraq War.

It was only four years later, in 2007, that a group of American journalists blew Alwan’s cover, blaming him and his lies for the drawn out. But Alwan shows no remorse. Today he takes pride in his role as the man who helped oust Saddam Hussein.

“The truth is what is in this film. Everything else is false, even if the statements were made by me.”

Rafed Ahmed Alwan

Alwan’s arrival in Germany in 1999 immediately aroused interest at the Office for Special Inquiry in Zirndorf. The Iraqi refugee seemed to have information that Iraq was developing chemical and biological weapons, and his story seemed plausible. Posing as UN Weapons Inspectors, German intelligence agents conducted a thorough debriefing, hoping that Alwan could substantiate their fear that Saddam Hussein

possessed weapons of mass destruction.

It was all a game, and Alwan knew all the rules: The more information he provided, the more benefits he receives. And he got it all: an apartment, cash, and a growing sense of freedom. The intelligence community relied on him, and in turn, he relied on them. What no one realized at the time was that in this “cat and mouse” game, there could be no winner. After the BND contacted his former boss, Dr. Basil Saati, to confirm Alwan’s reports. Saati told them that Alwan’s statements were false, Alwan felt betrayed, and the interviews came to an abrupt end.

Then the 9.11 attacks occurred. The Americans suddenly remembered Alwan and the information he once provided. It didn’t matter whether it had been confirmed or not. In the heat of the moment, it was just what they needed to justify their invasion of Iraq. The interviews started all over again, Alwan’s statements were updated, and eventually, he was quoted by none other than Colin Powell himself, Secretary of State of the United States, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during Operation Desert Storm.

Alwan’s story reveals the mechanisms in play at the intersection of politics and intelligence. He may have been just a means to an end, but he remains a controversial figure, who is difficult to place in any convenient box. War of Lies is a portrait of a man, who unwittingly changed the course of history by miscalculating the consequences of his lie. His story would make an electrifying political thriller, but it is really a journey into the depths of our human nature.

TECHNICAL DATA

TITLE WAR OF LIES
GENRE Documentary
LENGTH 89:44 Min.
YEAR OF PRODUCTION 2014
COUNTRY OF PRODUCTION Germany
SCREENING FORMAT DCP, 1:2,35, 25fps, Color
ADDITIONAL FORMATS HD Cam, HD Cam SR, Blu-Ray
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic, English, German
SUBTITLE OPTIONS English and German
VOICE-OVER German version available

CREW

DIRECTOR & SCRIPT Matthias Bittner

DOP Julia Schlingmann
EDITOR Friedemann Schmidt
ORIGINAL MUSIC Philipp Kobilke
SOUND RECORDIST Thorsten Bolzé, Jens Neubert, Lena Zagikyan
SOUND DESIGN Frederik Pfeiffer, David Lackovic
FOLEY-ARTIST Olaf Simon
RE-RECORDING MIXER Gregor Bonse – Rotor Film Babelsberg
TITLE- & GRAPHIC DESIGN Ollie Peters, Sven Züge - Filmgraphik
COLOR GRADING Fabian Spang
COMPOSITING David Henning, Moritz Bock – MovieBrats

COMMISSIONING EDITOR Kai Henkel (SWR)
 Claudia Gladziejewski (BR)
CO-PRODUCER Matthias Drescher
 Philipp Knauss
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER Lena Kraeber

PRODUCER Paul Zischler
 Susanne Mann

WORLD SALES

CINEPHIL Philippa Kowarsky
 18 Levontin Street
 Tel Aviv 65112, Israel
 Tel: +972 3 566 4129
 Fax: +972 3 560 1436
 philippa@cinephil.co.il

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I was stunned when I first heard that Rafed Ahmed Alwan was supposed to be the one man most responsible for causing the Second Iraq War in 2003. How? It made no sense that a single individual could lead the world's best intelligence agencies along by the nose, convincing them of all his stories. Was he a genius, a jack-of-all-trades, who knew every trick in the proverbial book? Was he some kind of real-life James Bond?

No. He is none of the above. Having spent almost three years working on this film, I got to know Rafed Ahmed Alwan. He is hardly a debonair master of espionage, who faces every threat with a lackadaisical grin. I found a man who trusts in no one, and who sees treachery lurking behind every corner. He is a man who spent thirty years surviving the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein, and escaped it with a veritable degree in the art of lying and deception. He then spent ten years honing his skills under the aegis of the German secret service, where he learned to blur even the sharpest distinctions between right and wrong, truth and falsehood. Today he is using all these techniques in his own defense. Crucified by the media, he currently bears the brunt of blame for the 2003 Iraq War. Given his harrowing personal legacy, can he be expected to tell the truth?

As a documentary filmmaker, I'm presented with a quandary. On one hand, getting to the truth is the very essence of the genre. But can a documentary that deals with international intrigue, intelligence, and war ever really speak the truth? Can a protagonist like Alwan be trusted, when his lies resulted in a decade of war? Is it possible to have faith in a man, who will go down in history as a liar? The truth is that all of us lie. We lie every day for a variety of reasons. We lie out of fear and out of shame, but we also lie out of common courtesy, realizing that a lie can be more comforting than a bitter truth. We all need lies to cope with life. According to one social biologist, lies are the engine of cultural progress. It is falsehood – not truth – that makes us truly human.

Rafed Ahmed Alwan's lie had fatal consequences for himself, and even more so, for an entire country, his country. Today he claims that he always knew that his lies could lead to war. In fact, that is his justification for lying. Without that war, his homeland Iraq would never have experienced the change it so needed. Without his lie, Iraq would see no progress.

This strange claim echoed in my mind throughout the making of the film. I could not help wonder what must be going through a person's head to make him want to plunge his country into war. What horrors must he have experienced there to find relief in the horrors of war?

Perhaps Alwan just wants to be seen as a hero, who helped liberate his country from a tyrannical regime. Perhaps he simply wants to assuage his guilt. There is one thing I am certain of, however. He may have lied successfully to people and governments. His lie may have fooled entire agencies that specialize in deceit. There is, however, one person, who was never fooled by Alwan, and that is Alwan himself. By better understanding him, we can understand his lie.

After extensive research, I gave up on my original notion of telling his story based on cold facts. I decided to understand the man himself, including his convoluted psyche. How does he deal with the burden of the lie he told and its vicious consequences? How has it transformed him? Is he even able to reflect on what really happened?

I now believe that it is impossible to get to the absolute truth. The thicket of constructed realities, misinformation, and political interests is far too tangled for that, especially given the actions and reactions of all the other players in this drama. There seems to be a conspiracy of silence, intended to keep the public unaware of even the most basic facts. In some ways, this story even reminds me of the tangled web of lies surrounding the current wiretapping scandal in Germany and the role of the NSA.

Perhaps the French actor Jean Gabin was right when he said, „If all people always told the truth, it would be hell on earth.“

TEAM INFO

MATTHIAS BITTNER – script and director



Born in 1982. After graduation and community service, he completed several internships at film production companies and worked as an assistant director for feature films. Since 2007 he studied at the renowned Film Academy Baden-Württemberg as a director / documentary.

In addition to various short films which were selected at numerous festivals, he completed his first full-length documentary NOT IN MY BACKYARD. The controversial film about the rehabilitation of child molesters and sex offenders had its world premiere in 2011 as the opening film of the “Semaine de la critique” at the Festival del film Locarno and won the Baden-Wuerttemberg Film Award for Best Documentary in 2012.

With his second feature documentary WAR OF LIES, he graduated in 2014. Matthias Bittner currently lives and works in Munich.

Filmography (selection)

NOT IN MY BACKYARD (2011) – 87 min – documentary feature
 ...WIE DIE RABEN (2009) – 9 min – short fiction
 DIVORCE TALK (2009) – 26 min – documentary
 WILLKÜR (2008) – 6 min – short fiction
 OPERATION: TERROR TAPE (2007) - 6 min - animated short film

JULIA SCHLINGMANN – director of photography

Born 1981 In Wolfsburg, Germany. After graduating highschool she moved to Ham-burg for internships in the field of camera and lightrental-companies. She worked as a camera-assistant, electrician and photographer and was accepted for the course of camera-studies at the Filmakademie Baden-Wuerttemberg in 2007. Since then she realized about twelve short films and one feature film as a director of photography, her films acclaimed their premieres on well-known international festivals around the globe and were retailed by TV-stations. 2012 she was nominated for the Cameraimage Student Award and the Kodak Kamerapreis. 2013 she graduated successfully from filmschool. After a baby break she started her career as a freelancer with WAR OF LIES.

Filmography (selection)

REDLAND (2013) – 15 min – webseries by Christian Werner
 NOT IN MY BACKYARD (2011) – 90 min – documentary feature by Matthias Bittner
 FRAGMENTS (2011) – 30 min – short Fiction by Friederike Fiek

FRIEDEMANN SCHMIDT - editor

Born in 1982, Friedemann started an education at Bavaria Film in Munich in 2001. After that he worked for one more year as a postproduction manager at Bavaria. That followed a further education at Filmakademie Baden- Wuerttemberg in the field of Montage/ Editing. In summer 2010 he graduated from Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg and moved to Munich, where he works as a freelancer.

Filmography (selection)

KILLING ALL THE FLIES (2012) - 23 min - short fiction by Hanna Maria Heidrich

NOT IN MY BACKYARD (2011) - 90 min – documentary feature by Matthias Bittner

WHEN THE HURLYBURLY'S DONE - (2009) - 16 min - short fiction by Hanna Maria Heidrich

LENA KRAEBER – associate producer

Born 1984 near Cologne. After graduating highschool in 2004 she started an apprenticeship at Colonia Media Filmproduktion GmbH. She worked as the assistant of Producer Christian Granderath afterwards und and switched to teamWorx TV & Film GmbH Cologne with him in 2007. 2008 she started her studies at Filmakademie Baden-Wuerttemberg, degree course production, focus creative producing. She realized several shorts and documentaries, that were successfully nominated and awarded at renowned filmfestivals. 2011 she was chosen for the Hollywood Masterclass at UCLA Extensions in Los Angeles by the Baden-Wuerttemberg scholarship and was stipendiary of the collecting society of film- and tv-producers 2010-2012. 2014 she graduated with WAR OF LIES. Since 2013 she works as an producer for Alicia Remirez.

Filmography (selection)

ZU MIR ODER ZU DIR (2014) - 89 min – comedy by Ingo Rasper

MONA KRIEGT EIN BABY (2013) – 89 min – dramedy by Ben Verbong

THE SEA BETWEEN US (2012) – 37 min – drama by Julian Köberer

NIGHT SHIFT (2011) – 31 min - thriller by Jan Haering

PAUL ZISCHLER - producer

Paul studied at the German Film- and Television Academy Berlin (dffb). With the student-short WHATS LEFT he got nominated for the German Short Film Award and European Film Award. He was an advisor for the feature documentary FOOTBALL UNDER COVER, worked for Wim Wenders PALERMO SHOOTING and PINA 3D. As an assistant producer he joined A DANGEROUS METHOD by David Cronenberg in Berlin, Cologne und Vienna. He also worked for renowned companies such as Essential Film/ Coproduction Office, Cine Plus and New Road Movies and as an Executive Producer for films such as MISS JULIE by Liv Ullmann. With his own company zischlermann filmproduktion he lately produced the features LAND OF THE FREE by Moritz Laube and the German-Australian-Coproduction ELIXIR by Brodie Higgs and teamed up again with director Matthias Bittner for the feature documentary WAR OF LIES.

Filmography Producer (selection)

ELIXIR (2014) - GER/AUS - Drama by Brodie Higgs, Producer

MISS JULIE (2014) - UK/S - Drama by Liv Ullmann, Executive Producer

LAND OF THE FREE (2013) - Satire by Moritz Laube, Producer

CODENAME PIRAT (2012) - feature documentary by Eric Asch, Coproducer

NOT IN MY BACKYARD (2011) - feature documentary by Matthias Bittner, Producer

PRODUCTION COMPANY

zischlermann filmproduktion GmbH

zischlermann filmproduktion GmbH is a company based in Berlin und Dresden, Saxony. It was founded in 2009 by Susanne Mann (Dresden) and Paul Zischler (Berlin) to produce features and feature documentaries with international partners for an international market.

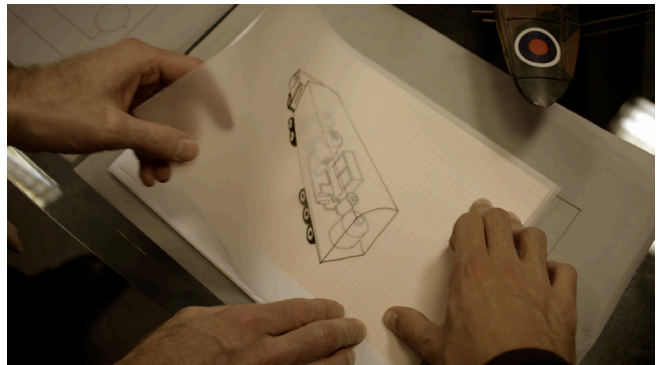
Besides the development of their own features and documentaries, the producers also provide their services in executing productions in Berlin and overall Germany. This is how shooting days for the music documentary FROM THE SKY DOWN about the band U2 and their album “Achtung Baby” by Oscar-winner Davis Guggenheim took place, as well as the shooting of the feature TIGERS by Oscar-and Cannes-winner Danis Tanovic starring Heino Ferch and the Indian star Emraan Hashmi.

Both producers Susanne Mann and Paul Zischler also work for other producers as Executive Producers or Lineproducers besides their own company. Lately, Susanne was responsible as an Executive Producer for Veit Helmers children movie FIDDLESTICKS (starring Fritzi Haberland, Samuel Finzi, etc.) and Paul Zischler for Liv Ullmanns MISS JULIE (starring Jessica Chastain and Colin Farrel).

Their latest international Coproductions are the German-Australian feature ELIXIR by director Brodie Higgs (with their company Elixir Films GmbH), the Austrian-German feature ADAMS END (starring Robert Stadlober, Dir: Richard Wilhelmer) and the documentary NOT IN MY BACKYARD (Dir: Matthias Bittner; Opening film of “Semaine de la Critique” at Filmfestival Locarno 2011), that was entirely shot in the US. Their first German cinema release took place with their feature LAND OF THE FREE by commercial-director Moritz Laube. It was financed by private equity and crowdfunding only.

Currently, there are two new documentaries in distribution: CODENAME PIRATE by Eric Asch and WAR OF LIES by Matthias Bittner. More features, documentaries and a first TV-series are in development and financing, as always.

STILLS



CONTACT DETAILS



zischlermann filmproduktion GmbH
 Kottbusser Damm 73
 10967 Berlin
 Germany
 Tel: +49 (0)30 5770975 – 20
 Fax: +49 (0)30 5770975 – 29
 kontakt@zischlermann.com
 www.zischlermann.com



Cinephil
 Philippa Kowarsky
 18 Levontin Street
 Tel Aviv 65112
 Israel
 Tel: +972 3 566 4129
 Fax: +972 3 560 1436
 info@cinephil.co.il

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