

In Their Own Words: Iraq's "Imminent" Threat

The Bush Administration is now saying it never told the public that Iraq was an "imminent" threat, and therefore it should be absolved for overstating the case for war and misleading the American people about Iraq's WMD. Just this week, White House spokesman Scott McClellan lashed out at critics saying "Some in the media have chosen to use the word 'imminent'. Those were not words we used." But a closer look at the record shows that McClellan himself and others did use the phrase "imminent threat" – while also using the synonymous phrases "mortal threat," "urgent threat," "immediate threat", "serious and mounting threat", "unique threat," and claiming that Iraq was actively seeking to "strike the United States with weapons of mass destruction" – all just months after Secretary of State Colin Powell admitted that Iraq was "contained" and "threatens not the United States." While Iraq was certainly a dangerous country, the Administration's efforts to claim it never hyped the threat in the lead-up to war is belied by its statements.

"There's no question that Iraq was a threat to the people of the United States."

- White House spokeswoman Claire Buchan, 8/26/03

"We ended the threat from Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction."

President Bush, 7/17/03

Iraq was "the most dangerous threat of our time."

- White House spokesman Scott McClellan, 7/17/03

"Saddam Hussein is no longer a threat to the United States because we removed him, but he was a threat...He was a threat. He's not a threat now."

- President Bush, 7/2/03

"Absolutely."

- White House spokesman Ari Fleischer answering whether Iraq was an "imminent threat," 5/7/03

"We gave our word that the threat from Iraq would be ended."

- President Bush 4/24/03

"The threat posed by Iraq's weapons of mass destruction will be removed."

- Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, 3/25/03

"It is only a matter of time before the Iraqi regime is destroyed and its threat to the region and the world is ended."

- Pentagon spokeswoman Victoria Clarke, 3/22/03

"The people of the United States and our friends and allies will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder."

- President Bush, 3/19/03

"The dictator of Iraq and his weapons of mass destruction are a threat to the security of free nations."

- President Bush, 3/16/03

"This is about imminent threat."

- White House spokesman Scott McClellan, 2/10/03

Iraq is "a serious threat to our country, to our friends and to our allies."

- Vice President Dick Cheney, 1/31/03

Iraq poses "terrible threats to the civilized world."

- Vice President Dick Cheney, 1/30/03

Iraq "threatens the United States of America."

- Vice President Cheney, 1/30/03

"Iraq poses a serious and mounting threat to our country. His regime has the design for a nuclear weapon, was working on several different methods of enriching uranium, and recently was discovered seeking significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

- Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, 1/29/03

"Well, of course he is."

- White House Communications Director Dan Bartlett responding to the question "is Saddam an imminent threat to U.S. interests, either in that part of the world or to Americans right here at home?", 1/26/03

"Saddam Hussein possesses chemical and biological weapons. Iraq poses a threat to the security of our people and to the stability of the world that is distinct from any other. It's a danger to its neighbors, to the United States, to the Middle East and to the international peace and stability. It's a danger we cannot ignore. Iraq and North Korea are both repressive dictatorships to be sure and both pose threats. But Iraq is unique. In both word and deed, Iraq has demonstrated that it is seeking the means to strike the United States and our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction."

- Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, 1/20/03

"The Iraqi regime is a threat to any American. ...Iraq is a threat, a real threat."

- President Bush, 1/3/03

"The world is also uniting to answer the unique and urgent threat posed by Iraq whose dictator has already used weapons of mass destruction to kill thousands."

- President Bush, 11/23/02

"I would look you in the eye and I would say, go back before September 11 and ask yourself this question: Was the attack that took place on September 11 an imminent threat the month before or two months before or three months before or six months before? When did the attack on September 11 become an imminent threat? Now, transport yourself forward a year, two years or a week or a month...So the question is, when is it such an immediate threat that you must do something?"

- Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, 11/14/02

"Saddam Hussein is a threat to America."

- President Bush, 11/3/02

"I see a significant threat to the security of the United States in Iraq."

- President Bush, 11/1/02

"There is real threat, in my judgment, a real and dangerous threat to American in Iraq in the form of Saddam Hussein."

- President Bush, 10/28/02

"The Iraqi regime is a serious and growing threat to peace."

- President Bush, 10/16/02

"There are many dangers in the world, the threat from Iraq stands alone because it gathers the most serious dangers of our age in one place. Iraq could decide on any given day to provide a biological or chemical weapon to a terrorist group or individual terrorists."

- President Bush, 10/7/02

"The Iraqi regime is a threat of unique urgency."

- President Bush, 10/2/02

"There's a grave threat in Iraq. There just is."

- President Bush, 10/2/02

"This man poses a much graver threat than anybody could have possibly imagined."

- President Bush, 9/26/02

"No terrorist state poses a greater or more immediate threat to the security of our people and the stability of the world than the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq."

- Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, 9/19/02

"Some have argued that the nuclear threat from Iraq is not imminent - that Saddam is at least 5-7 years away from having nuclear weapons. I would not be so certain. And we should be just as concerned about the immediate threat from biological weapons. Iraq has these weapons. "

- Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, 9/18/02

"Iraq is busy enhancing its capabilities in the field of chemical and biological agents, and they continue to pursue an aggressive nuclear weapons program. These are offensive weapons for the purpose of inflicting death on a massive scale, developed so that Saddam Hussein can hold the threat over the head of any one he chooses. What we must not do in the face of this mortal threat is to give in to wishful thinking or to willful blindness."

- Vice President Dick Cheney, 8/29/02