

# **Iraq On The Record**

## **The Bush Administration's Public Statements On Iraq**

**Prepared For Rep. Henry A. Waxman**

**United States House Of Representatives Committee On Government Reform**

**-- Minority Staff Special Investigations Division**

<http://www.reform.house.gov/min/>

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Read the 36-page PDF copy of *Iraq On The Record - The Bush Administration's Public Statements On Iraq*.

On March 19, 2003, U.S. forces began military operations in Iraq. Addressing the nation about the purpose of the war on the day the bombing began, President Bush stated: "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."

One year later, many doubts have been raised regarding the Administration's assertions about the threat posed by Iraq. Prior to the war in Iraq, the President and his advisors repeatedly claimed that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction that jeopardized the security of the United States. The failure to discover these weapons after the war has led to questions about whether the President and his advisors were candid in describing Iraq's threat.

The Iraq on the Record Report, prepared at the request of Rep. Henry A. Waxman, is a comprehensive examination of the statements made by the five Bush Administration officials most responsible for providing public information and shaping public opinion on Iraq: President George W. Bush, Vice President Richard Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell, and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice.

The *Iraq on the Record* report highlights selected statements by speaker and subject.

The *Iraq on the Record* database identifies 237 specific misleading statements about the threat posed by Iraq made by these five officials in 125 public appearances in the time leading up to and after the commencement of hostilities in Iraq. The search options on the left can be used to find statements by any combination of speaker, subject, keyword, or date.

The Special Investigations Division compiled a database of statements about Iraq made by President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Powell, and National Security Advisor Rice. All of the statements in the database were drawn from speeches, press conferences and briefings, interviews, written statements, and testimony by the five officials.

This Iraq on the Record database contains statements made by the five officials that were misleading at the time they were made. The database does not include statements that appear in hindsight to be erroneous but were accurate reflections of the views of intelligence officials at the time they were made.

For more information, see the Full Iraq on the Record Methodology.  
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The Conclusion of the report states:

Because of the gravity of the subject and the President's unique access to classified information, members of Congress and the public should expect the President and his senior officials to take special care to be balanced and accurate in describing national security threats. It does not appear, however, that President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Powell, and National Security Advisor Rice met this standard in the case of Iraq. To the contrary, these five officials repeatedly made misleading statements about the threat posed by Iraq. In 125 separate appearances, they made 11 misleading statements about the urgency of Iraq's threat, 81 misleading statements about Iraq's nuclear activities, 84 misleading statements about Iraq's chemical and biological capabilities, and 61 misleading statements about Iraq's relationship with al Qaeda.

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**Iraq On The Record: The Bush Administration's Public Statements On Iraq  
Committee On Government Reform -- Minority Office**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On March 19, 2003, U.S. forces began military operations in Iraq. Addressing the nation about the purpose of the war on the day the bombing began, President Bush stated: "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."

One year later, many doubts have been raised regarding the Administration's assertions about the threat posed by Iraq. Prior to the war in Iraq, the President and his advisors repeatedly claimed that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction that jeopardized the security of the United States. The failure to discover these weapons after the war has led to questions about whether the President and his advisors were candid in describing Iraq's threat.

This report, which was prepared at the request of Rep. Henry A. Waxman, is a comprehensive examination of the statements made by the five Administration officials most responsible for providing public information and shaping public opinion on Iraq: President George Bush, Vice President Richard Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell, and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice. It finds that the five officials made misleading statements about the threat posed by Iraq in 125 public appearances. The report and an accompanying database identify 237 specific misleading statements by the five officials.

## Methodology

The Special Investigations Division compiled a database of statements about Iraq made by President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Powell, and National Security Advisor Rice. All of the statements in the database were drawn from speeches, press conferences and briefings, interviews, written statements, and testimony by the five officials.

This *Iraq on the Record* database contains statements made by the five officials that were misleading at the time they were made. The database does not include statements that appear in hindsight to be erroneous but were accurate reflections of the views of intelligence officials at the time they were made. The entire database is accessible to members of Congress and the public at [www.reform.house.gov/min](http://www.reform.house.gov/min).

This report is a summary of the *Iraq on the Record* database. Because the officials' statements have been compiled into a searchable database, the report can make new observations about the topics that were the subject of misleading claims, the timing of these claims, and the officials who were responsible. To ensure objectivity, the report was peer reviewed for fairness and accuracy by two leading experts: Joseph Cirincione, senior associate and director of the Non-Proliferation Project at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Greg Thielmann, former acting director of the Office of Strategic, Proliferation, and Military Affairs in the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

## Findings

**Number of Misleading Statements.** The Iraq on the Record database contains 237 misleading statements about the threat posed by Iraq that were made by President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Powell, and National Security Advisor Rice. These statements were made in 125 separate appearances, consisting of 40 speeches, 26 press conferences and briefings, 53 interviews, 4 written statements, and 2 congressional testimonies. Most of the statements in the database were misleading because they expressed certainty where none existed or failed to acknowledge the doubts of intelligence officials. Ten of the statements were simply false.

**Timing of the Statements.** The statements began at least a year before the commencement of hostilities in Iraq, when Vice President Cheney stated on March 17, 2002: "We know they have biological and chemical weapons." The Administration's misleading statements continued through January 22, 2004, when Vice President Cheney insisted: "there's overwhelming evidence that there was a connection between al-Qaeda and the Iraqi government." Most of the misleading statements about Iraq -- 161 statements -- were made prior to the start of the war. But 76 misleading statements were made by the five Administration officials after the start of the war to justify the decision to go to war.

The 30-day period with the greatest number of misleading statements was the period before the congressional vote on the Iraq war resolution. Congress voted on the measure on October 10 and October 11, 2002. From September 8 through October 8, 2002, the five officials made 64 misleading statements in 16 public appearances. A large number of misleading

statements were also made during the two months before the war began. Between January 19 and March 19, 2003, the five officials made 48 misleading statements in 26 public appearances.

**Topics of the Statements.** The 237 misleading statements can be divided into four categories. The five officials made 11 statements that claimed that Iraq posed an urgent threat; 81 statements that exaggerated Iraq's nuclear activities; 84 statements that overstated Iraq's chemical and biological weapons capabilities; and 61 statements that misrepresented Iraq's ties to al Qaeda.

**Statements by President Bush.** Between September 12, 2002, and July 17, 2003, President Bush made 55 misleading statements about the threat posed by Iraq in 27 separate public appearances. On October 7, 2002, three days before the congressional votes on the Iraqi war resolution, President Bush gave a speech in Cincinnati, Ohio, with 11 misleading statements, the most by any of the five officials in a single appearance.

Some of the misleading statements by President Bush include his statement in the January 28, 2003, State of the Union address that "the British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa"; his statement on October 2, 2002, that "the Iraqi regime is a threat of unique urgency"; and his statement on May 1, 2003, that "the liberation of Iraq . . . removed an ally of al Qaeda."

**Statements by Vice President Cheney.** Between March 17, 2002, and January 22, 2004, Vice President Cheney made 51 misleading statements about the threat posed by Iraq in 25 separate public appearances.

Some of the misleading statements by Vice President Cheney include his statement on September 8, 2002, that "we do know, with absolute certainty, that he is using his procurement system to acquire the equipment he needs . . . to build a nuclear weapon"; his statement on March 16, 2003, that "we believe he has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons"; and his statement on October 10, 2003, that Saddam Hussein "had an established relationship with al Qaeda."

**Statements by Secretary Rumsfeld.** Between May 22, 2002, and November 2, 2003, Secretary Rumsfeld made 52 misleading statements about the threat posed by Iraq in 23 separate public appearances.

Some of the misleading statements by Secretary Rumsfeld include his statement on November 14, 2002, that within "a week, or a month" Saddam Hussein could give his weapons of mass destruction to al Qaeda, which could use them to attack the United States and kill "30,000, or 100,000 . . . human beings"; his statement on January 29, 2003, that Saddam Hussein's regime "recently was discovered seeking significant quantities of uranium from Africa"; and his statement on July 13, 2003, that there "was never any debate" about whether Iraq had a nuclear program.

**Statements by Secretary Powell.** Between April 3, 2002, and October 3, 2003, Secretary Powell made 50 misleading statements about the threat posed by Iraq in 34 separate public appearances.

Secretary Powell sometimes used caveats and qualifying language in his public statements. His statements that contained such cautions or limitations were not included in the database. Nonetheless, many of Secretary Powell's statements did not include these qualifiers and were misleading in their expression of certainty, such as his statement on May 22, 2003, that "there is no doubt in our minds now that those vans were designed for only one purpose, and that was to make biological weapons."

**Statements by National Security Advisor Rice.** Between September 8, 2002, and September 28, 2003, National Security Advisor Rice made 29 misleading statements about the threat posed by Iraq in 16 separate public appearances.

Although Ms. Rice had the fewest public appearances and the fewest misleading statements, she had the highest number of statements -- 8 -- that were false. These false statements included several categorical assertions that that no one in the White House knew of the intelligence community's doubts about the President's assertion that Iraq sought to import uranium from Africa.